

THE **HARDY BOYS**®



17

THE SECRET WARNING

FRANKLIN W.
DIXON



THE SECRET WARNING

By FRANKLIN W. DIXON

No. 17 in the HARDY BOYS series

This is the original 1938 text.

In the 1938 original, the Hardy Boys go deep sea diving to recover the treasure from the sunken "Katawa" and foil the plans of the thuggish Gus Kuntz. The 1966 revision is completely different.

The Hardy Boys series by Franklin W. Dixon, the first 58 titles.

The first year is the original year. The second is the year it was revised.

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CHAPTER I

TROUBLE!

Tap! Tap! Tap!

"It's a mystery to me," said Joe Hardy as he worked over the engine of the *Sleuth*, "what it is that puts this motor out of order all the time."

"If we were in Dad's shoes, we'd have the case cleared up at once," replied his brother Frank, referring to their father, Fenton Hardy, well-known detective. "And speaking of shoes, I'll bet you don't know which is the heaviest pair of shoes in the world."

Chet Morton, their stout chum, who was propped comfortably against a bulkhead while the brothers worked over their motorboat, grinned good-naturedly.

"Maybe Frank means *mine!*" he drawled.

"I'm sure I don't know," admitted Joe.

"I'm afraid you both flunk the examination," declared Frank. "No, Chet's shoes are not the

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heaviest in the world unless they happen to weigh thirty-two pounds apiece."

The other two whistled in surprise.

"Thirty-two p--pounds apiece!" exclaimed Chet. "Whew! Must be made for dinosaurs!"

"If you weren't one of the best students in Bayport High I'd say you're a bit daffy," said Joe, giving his brother a playful push. "Even a circus fat man

doesn't wear such heavy shoes."

Frank was obviously enjoying the stir he had created in the little group.

"No," he said, "the people who wear thirty-two pound shoes aren't dinosaurs and they aren't circus fat men. They're *divers*. Deep-sea divers."

Chet scratched his tousled head thoughtfully. "That's right," he exclaimed. "I remember reading about them somewhere."

"But you don't remember just what or where," taunted Joe. "Frank, where did *you* learn so much about divers all of a sudden!"

His brother carefully scraped some carbon from a spark-plug. "Fellow I met yesterday in the barber shop told me a lot about deep-sea diving for sunken treasure. Said he was a diver himself. His shoes have to be weighted down with lead to keep him upright under water and what's more, he has to carry eighty pounds of lead weights over his shoulders; one on his back, the other on his chest to steady him under the surface."

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"Say, I'd like to meet that fellow!" exclaimed Joe. "Who is he, anyway?"

The words were barely out of his mouth when Frank, who had happened to glance up, caught his brother's arm.

"Look, Joe, there he comes now along the dock. Yes, it's the same man!"

Joe saw a tall, lanky figure sauntering along the wooden walk in their direction.

"You chaps wait here a minute," Frank suggested. "I'll speak to him."

He jumped to the pier just as his new acquaintance arrived at the *Sleuth's* mooring cleat.

"Why, hello there!" greeted the newcomer affably. "Aren't you the chap I met yesterday in the barber shop?"

"I certainly am, Mr.-----"

"Perry," finished the other, smiling agreeably. "Roland Perry. Fine-looking boat you have there. Is it yours?"

"My brother Joe and I own it. Joe," he called, "this is Mr. Perry, the diver I told you about. And this is Chet Morton," he added.

The stranger climbed down into the boat and shook hands with the boys. Then he seated himself astride an old box.

"We'll be through in a few minutes, Mr. Perry," said the older Hardy boy as he turned to replace a cleaned spark-plug. "I've been telling my brother and Chet about the thirty-two pound shoes you said divers have to wear."

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Perry leaned back languidly and half closed his blue eyes. "Yes, we have to wear heavy shoes, all right."

He seemed to be meditating, and for a moment said nothing more. Finally he stretched his long legs across an oil tin and chuckled.

"Funny thing, fellows, how I am reminded of the time I was caught in a room just about the size of this boat on the old *Borentic*. I was on a diving job. Boy! I thought that would be my last minute-and it almost was!"

"The *Borentic*!" exclaimed Frank. "I remember when that sank-during a hurricane, wasn't it? Did you dive for that?"

Perry grinned. "Well, I didn't exactly dive for the *Borentic*, but I did make a try for the hundred thousand dollars she had in her vault. What a job! She was lying at a forty-five degree angle in almost two hundred feet of water, and Kuntz and I were detailed to find the vault, blow it open, and bring up the valuables."

"And you got caught in the room? How come?" queried Frank, while the others stared open-mouthed at the engaging narrator.

Perry's eyes once again assumed a far-away look. "Well, we had to cut a hole in the side of the ship to get in. We did this with blowtorches. When we finished this job, I was ordered to go in first."

By this time the brothers had ceased their tinkering completely, and were listening to the story-teller breathlessly.

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"And you had only ten minutes in which to find the vault?" interposed Joe.

Perry nodded. "Not a second more. There was no telling what obstacles I might encounter in that short space of time. Well, I-" He hesitated as the roar of a passing motorboat momentarily drowned out his words. Then he went on, "I climbed carefully through the jagged hole in the side of the vessel and slowly felt my way along the tilted corridor."

"I can feel cold chills along my spine already," Joe murmured.

"Me too!" came Chet's emphatic agreement.

Perry's face grew tense. "All of a sudden, without any warning whatsoever, the rotting timbers gave way beneath me and I crashed into a cabin below. My lifeline was caught in some splintered rafters above my head and couldn't be used to pull me up. I had only four minutes left!"

"Whew!" whistled Chet, mopping his brow. "I think I'll leave diving off my list of sports!"

"What happened then, Mr. Perry?" asked Frank.

The diver shrugged his shoulders. "I'm still here, so you know I moved successfully. Just as I was about to faint from exhaustion, for I'd been down long past my limit, my foot touched a metal ladder that had been used to reach a trapdoor. That contrivance saved my

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life, but I was in the hospital for nearly three months afterward."

The tense silence that followed Perry's tale was broken only by the hoarse cough of another motorboat cruising near them in Barmet Bay. At length Frank stood up and reached for his wrench.

"Who was that Kuntz fellow you mentioned?" he queried.

Perry's face took on a worried look. "He used to work with me, but now he has a diving corporation of his own. I think he's one of my bitterest enemies."

The Hardys looked wonderingly at the tall, scowling fellow before them. They sensed that trouble of a deep nature had stirred this man, and they feared that there might be more in the offing.

"Maybe we can help you!" exclaimed Joe.

Perry brightened, waved his big hand, and quickly changed the subject. "Say, here I've been doing all this talking and keeping you boys from your work. How's it coming?"

"Ho! I think we'd all rather hear your experiences than work on a motor," Frank laughed, and his chums agreed heartily. "There seems to be something wrong with this timing gear," he continued. "I can't seem to straighten it out."

"Let me have a look," Perry offered. In an instant he had shown the boys how to adjust the delicate mechanism. "I think we have it

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now," he said a moment later. "Start her up, Frank."

"All right, Mr. Perry."

Frank turned on the ignition. The engine spluttered, hesitated, then sprang into life. An instant later the boat lurched suddenly and spun away from the dock.

"Thought we'd better have a little spin before lunch!" came a cry from Chet who was at the helm.

Joe laughed. "It's mutiny, Frank!" he shouted above the clatter of the motor. "You didn't tell Chet to go! Maybe you'd better take the wheel yourself. No saying what our Quartermaster will bump into, with all the Yacht Club boats anchored around."

"And I must be going," said Perry, cupping his hands to make himself heard. "Better drop me off at the dock first if you're sailing any distance. I've an important engagement."

As Frank took a step toward Chet, the fat boy gave the wheel a sudden sharp twist.

"Buoy ahead!" he shouted. "Almost-----"

He was interrupted by a cry from Joe. "Lookout!"

The younger Hardy lad's warning came too late. With a sudden splintering crash the *Sleuth* plowed into a smaller motorboat that suddenly had appeared from astern.

The impact flung Perry into the water. Two irate men in the other boat cursed loudly and shook their fists at the boys.

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"You'll pay for this-plenty!" snarled one, a short, thick-set individual with a vicious face.

"Yeah-you Hardys'11 hear from *us!*" yelled his companion menacingly. He was thin and bony, with a hawk-like nose and a plainly visible scar across one cheek.

Before the boys had time to collect their wits, the strangers, muttering threats, gunned their motor and headed swiftly for the opposite shore of the bay.

Frank Hardy leaped to the *Sleuth's* helm. "Where's Perry?" he yelled. "Joe! Chet! Where's-----"

"Over here!" came a hoarse cry from somewhere astern.

Frank advanced the throttle to full speed and the *Sleuth* lunged through the heavy surf like a giant fish. A moment later Joe tossed out the life-ring.

"I have it!" gasped the diver. He was a strong swimmer, but his heavy clothes and the choppy waters handicapped him considerably.

Frank kept the *Sleuth's* bow headed into the wind while Joe and Chet tugged at the life-line. A few seconds later Perry, dripping and disheveled, was back on deck.

"Whew!" he panted as the boys eyed him with concern. "Fine sort of an accident for a professional *diver!*" Suddenly his sheepish grin became a frown. "But look at me-and I'm supposed to meet Fenton Hardy, the detective, in ten minutes!"

CHAPTER H

A STBANGB DISAPPEARANCE

"yott'be in luck, Mr. Perry!" burst out Frank. "Joe and I are Mr. Hardy's sons!"

" Yes," added Joe excitedly. " You can come home with us now. We'll lend you some dry clothes and introduce you to Dad!"

"Well, this is a pleasant coincidence!" exclaimed the diver. "Bad luck and good, all in the space of a few minutes! I'm ready when you are."

In their excitement the boys had all but forgotten the occupants of the other boat. As Frank eased the *Sleuth* back alongside the dock, he frowned.

"Wonder who those fellows were!" he mused, "And how did they know our names!"

Joe made the craft fast to her cleat. " I can't imagine," he said thoughtfully. "But I *do* know that I didn't like their looks much."

"If they aren't a couple of thugs I'll eat my hat," Chet remarked. "And that reminds me, isn't it about time for lunch?"

"Same old Chet!" laughed the younger Hardy. "But you'd better be careful. We might hold you to that hat-eating promise of

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yours, just in case those fellows turn out to be nice after all."

"Chet wouldn't mind that," Frank observed dryly.

The chums enjoyed another hearty laugh with their good-natured friend, whose favorite melody was the sound of the dinner-bell. At the corner of Locust Street Chet took leave of the others, heading for his own home at the opposite end of town.

"Well, here we are!" announced Joe in a few minutes as they arrived at a large, handsome etone residence on a quiet street. "Come in, Mr. Perry."

The brothers presented their guest to their mother, who promised them luncheon immediately. "And Frank," she admonished, "get Mr. Perry some dry clothes at once. I think one of your father's suits will fit him better than yours."

It turned out that Mrs. Hardy was correct. Frank was tall but Perry was even taller. His attempt to don Frank's blue serge met with snickers of amused disapproval from Joe.

"Here's one of Dad's," suggested Frank at length. He emerged from his father's closet with a neatly-pressed English tweed suit, and the fit was perfect.

A few moments later as they were eating a delicious meal, the telephone bell rang.

"It's your father," Mrs. Hardy announced as she returned to the table. "He called to say

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that he won't be home until this evening. In that case," she smiled, turning to Perry, "you'd better stay here and have dinner with us."

The genial diver accepted with a smile ot pleasure, much to the delight of the boys, who hoped to hear further accounts of Perry's adventures. Both Hardy lads were curious as to the diver's reason for wanting to interview their father. They had long since learned that when a stranger called to interview Fenton Hardy, his visit invariably meant that something very important was pending.

The famous detective had come to depend a great deal upon his sons for assistance in solving the problems of his professional career.

As true offspring of the renowned detective who had made a reputation for himself with the New York Police Department, they had inherited his unusual keenness and with that his uncanny ability for solving mysteries. In many instances the boys had become involved in adventures of their own,

during which they had demonstrated repeatedly a rare courage and wisdom in the face of great danger.

Their first success had occurred when they had located valuable loot which a dying criminal had confessed to them had been hidden "in the tower." The favorable outcome of this case had encouraged them to tackle other problems, including one about a sinister sign post, when Frank and Joe undertook to unravel the nays*

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tery surrounding the disappearance of a splen-did race horse. In another instance the two lads had exposed a gang of fake eye doctors who had extorted thousands of dollars from unsuspecting victims.

Their success in solving these and other mysteries, as well as bringing the criminals involved in each to swift justice, had won for the Hardy brothers wide reputations of their own as amateur detectives. They had encountered many thrilling adventures, and incidentally had earned substantial sums of money in the form of rewards for their work.

"Well," remarked Frank between mouthfuls of luscious apple pie, "now that Mr. Perry is going to stay for the afternoon, he can have his suit pressed at the tailor's and wear Dad's until tonight."

"Oh, I wouldn't want to impose-----"

"Now that's quite all right, Mr. Perry," said the boys' mother, who always exerted herself to the utmost for the comfort of her sons' friends. "If you take your suit to the tailor's right away it should be ready for you by supper time."

Inasmuch as Perry had several other errands, it was agreed that he should join the boys at their home later in the afternoon.

"In the meantime," Frank suggested, "Joe and I will go down and have a look at the *Sleuth*."

"Good idea," agreed his brother. "I think

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that in the excitement this morning we all forgot to look at the damage done to our trusty ship."

Perry excused himself and a few moments later the boys departed for the dock.

"Wonder about that other boat. Do you suppose she was hurt much, Frank?" queried Joe as the brothers approached the dock.

"Really didn't have time to notice. I don't see how she could have been damaged to any extent. Motor sounded fine when the men left, and she certainly wasn't sinking!"

A detailed inspection of their own craft revealed nothing wrong except a large bruise in the paint near the bow. This the boys retouched, and less than an hour later they returned home to await Perry. To their surprise they were greeted in the living room by the familiar figure of a man, tall and immaculately dressed. He had a shrewd, clean-cut face.

"Hello, Dad!" exclaimed Frank. "We didn't expect you home so soon!"

Fenton Hardy smiled evasively, and the boys knew instinctively that their famous father was working on an important case.

"Hello, boys!" He leaned back in his chair in an attitude of preoccupation. "What's the news with you!"

The brothers needed no second invitation to tell their parent of the diver's visit and the incident in the bay.

"Mr. Perry's in town now, Dad, and he'll be

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back here before supper time," Frank said, concluding his account of the day's happenings. "He still has on your suit, the English tweed, but he'll-----"

At mention of the suit Mr. Hardy suddenly frowned. "Just a minute," he interrupted mysteriously. Then he crossed the room to the desk where he hurriedly ran through some papers.

"What's wrong, Dad?" queried Frank, gazing at his father uneasily.

"Did you boys happen to empty the pockets of that suit before you gave it to Perry?"

"Golly, Frank, we didn't-!" Joe sat bolt upright, big-eyed with alarm.

"Boys," announced Mr. Hardy gravely, "you'll have to do some fast work. The coat contained every single note I've made on an important case. If I lose them I'll lose the case, and what's worse, a dangerous criminal will probably get away. Find that suit at once!"

It was seldom that Mr. Hardy had occasion to deal out a command to his sons with such emphasis. The brothers jumped to obey, well aware that their father's tone implied a grave crisis.

At that moment Mrs. Hardy came downstairs. "What's the matter?" She gazed from one to the other, noting the anxiety in their faces.

"The suit we lent Mr. Perry has some of Dad's notes in it," Frank explained. "Of

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course, he said he'd be back here some time this afternoon, and-----"

"I came down to tell you," Mrs. Hardy interrupted, "that Mr. Perry phoned not long ago to say he had received an emergency telegram from his company calling him back immediately. He was taking a plane at once."

"What about the suit?" interposed Joe.

"And what about his company?" queried Frank. "Which one does he work for?"

"He didn't mention it. He seemed to be in a hurry and hung up before I could ask him any questions."

Mr. Hardy paced the floor reflectively.

"Come on, Joe," suggested Frank at length. "We can't stay here wasting time. We'll find the tailor Mr. Perry went to. Maybe he left word there where he could be reached."

The brothers jumped into their car and made a quick canvass of the various cleaning establishments in Bayport. At their third call they located Perry's wet suit. Unfortunately the diver had left no word at that place of his destination.

A quick ride to the airport likewise proved fruitless. Perry had taken the two o'clock plane for New York, the boys were told, but other than that the airport officials could supply no information.

Sick at heart over their costly error, the brothers returned home. Fenton Hardy met them at the door.

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"It's all right!" lie said brightly. "I've located Perry's company and sent them a wire to have him call me when he gets in."

"Dad, you're a whiz!" exclaimed Frank admiringly.

"Agreed!" Joe seconded. "How on earth did you ever find Mr. Perry's headquarters! You didn't have a single clue!"

Fenton Hardy laughed. "Boys," he said jovially, "I *did* have a clue, and so did you! You forgot to call at the telegraph office to find out where Perry's wire came from. I did that, and was told that the Crux Company of New York had sent for him."

"Gosh, what simpletons we are!" Frank blurted out sheepishly. His brother grinned in abashed agreement.

The telephone rang just then and Mr. Hardy answered it in the next room. A moment later he came back, frowning.

"A wire from the Crux Company, boys. They've sent your friend Perry on a diving job at Bailey's Landing. I can't leave. You'll have to go after him. I *must* have those notes within forty-eight hours!"

CHAPTER HI

caught !

"All set, Joe?"

Frank sat at the wheel of the brothers' car, studying a map, while Joe stowed away a second suitcase in the luggage trunk. It was barely forty-five minutes ago that their father had told them to find Perry. Since time was an all-important factor under the circumstances, the boys had packed hastily.

"All ready, Frank," sang out the younger Hardy lad as he swung himself into the seat beside his brother.

Suddenly there was a shout, and two rough-looking men stepped alongside the car.

"Wait a minute, you!" snarled one of them gruffly, seizing Joe by the sleeve.

"Come out of there, both of you!" snapped the other. "We have a little matter to settle with you."

The Hardys recognized them as the men who had occupied the other motorboat which had figured in the mix-up that morning.

"Well, what do you want!" Frank inquired with a look of annoyed surprise.

"Here!" snorted the thick-set individual who V

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had spoken first. "What are you going to do about this?" He shoved a paper at Frank.

"Malwey Boat Works," the lad read aloud. "Repairs to motorboat, sixty-five dollars. Sixty-five dollars! Say, what is this?"

"You'll find out soon enough, if you don't pay up pretty quick!" growled the thick-set man.

"Maybe they don't remember runnin' us down this morning, Simon," sneered the other. He was a thin, undernourished-looking fellow.

Joe felt himself reddening with anger.

"Look here, you two," he blurted out. "I'm not so sure we ran you down. If we did, we caused no sixty-five dollars' worth of damage, and you know it!"

The two ruffians laughed derisively.

"Funny guy, eh?" snorted the thin one. "Well, you'll pay it or we'll promise you more trouble than you'd like to have." At the last word he scowled ominously.

"Tell you what we'll do," suggested Frank. "We'll all go down to Malwey's and find out about it."

"And no funny business!" warned the one addressed as Simon. The two strangers headed for their car, which apparently was parked around a corner.

At the boat shop Jim Malwey, who had known the Hardy boys since their infancy, drew his young friends aside. "Listen," he whispered, "these fellows are trying to frame you. The

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accident caused about five dollars' worth of damage. The rest of the bill is for equipment they want me to install. They're trying to make you pay for all of it."

"Thanks, Jim. Say, who are they, anyway!" Frank inquired of the elderly shipbuilder.

"Thin one's named Ed Bock. The other fellow is Pete Simon. They come in here once, in a while for repairs to their boat. Don't know where they're from. Can't say I like their looks much."

"Nor do I!" agreed Joe emphatically.

The strangers were becoming impatient. "Say, what's all this whisperin' about?" demanded Bock, advancing toward the boys from their boat, where he and his companion had been inspecting the repairs.

"Yeah," agreed Simon. "What's going on here? How about that money? We ain't got all day!"

Frank strolled over to Bock, who was standing with his arms defiantly set on his hips.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Bock," he said, restraining with difficulty an impulse to knock down the impudent fellow, "but the bill for the damage we caused you is only five dollars. We'll pay that much and no more."

"Huh!" snorted Simon. "You think you can get away with *that*?"

"We'll give you five dollars and not a cent more!" stated Joe flatly.

Suddenly the shop door swung open and a

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plump figure waddled in. "What's all the shooting about?" came in a ludicrous drawl.

Bock and Simon spun around simultaneously. Joe laughed. "Hello, Chet!" he chuckled. "You're just in time for a hold-up. These fellows are trying to charge us sixty-five dollars for running into their boat this morning!"

Chet thoughtfully munched an apple. "If you're the chaps whose boat *I* ran into this morning, I'll pay you for it," he offered innocently.

"Oh, so *you're* the kid that ran us down!" Bock spat. "Well, you owe us sixty-five bucks!"

Frank held up his hand. "I think we've done enough arguing," he said decisively. "We'll pay you five dollars and no more. That's that!"

Bock spluttered with rage. "You'll pay for this a thousand times over!" he fairly screamed at the chums. "You'll-----"

His stocky companion seized him by the arm.

"Calm down, Bock," he muttered. "These guys and their friend Perry will be sorry soon enough. They'll find out that it won't do 'em any good to trifle with *us*!"

"That's right," agreed the other. Then he turned to Frank with an evil smile. "Be kind of funny, wouldn't it, if your friend Perry should get his lifeline cut some time?" he hissed.

The older Hardy lad felt a chill at mention of Perry. Was that remark merely a cowardly

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bluff to frighten them, or was it a secret warning! He could not decide at the moment. Nevertheless, he was unable to shake off a feeling that these cruel-looking strangers were going to cause them trouble.

The chums talked over the matter among themselves, then decided to remain firm. Frank placed a five-dollar bill on a nearby desk.

"There," he announced, "that pays for the damage we did to your boat. Come on, fellows, let's get going. See you later, Jim."

The chums filed out, leaving the elderly shipbuilder to smile triumphantly at Bock and Simon, who stood glaring after the boys and muttering threats.

"Good work, Frank!" exclaimed Joe admiringly as the brothers clambered back into their car. "Serves them right! Jump in, Chet!"

"I wonder," mused his brother, "if they really meant what they said about Mr. Perry's lifeline. Golly, I'd hate to have anything happen to him!"

"So would I," Joe agreed. "We'd better warn him about it when we find him at Bailey's Landing."

"Bailey's Landing!" blinked Chet from the rear seat. "Say, what are you two planning now! Another trip?"

Joe laughed. The Hardys had been so concerned with Bock and Simon that they had completely forgotten to tell their chum the

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latest difficulty. Now Chet begged to be taken along on the boys' projected search for Perry. Though he seldom was of any real assistance in

solving their problems, his genial good nature had relieved them of much worry and nerve strain on many occasions.

"All right, Chet," Frank agreed. "We'll drive around to your house at once and tell your family."

No sooner had the boys entered the Morton home than Chet uttered a shout.

"Cookies!" he exclaimed. "Golly! We're just in time! Smell 'em?"

He made a bee-line for the kitchen. In a few moments he returned, grinning broadly. "I was right! The girls are making cookies I Whoopee!"

His sister Tola emerged from the kitchen with her chum Gallic Shaw. Upon hearing of the boys' projected journey, the girls promptly wrapped up a generous supply of cookies as a farewell gift. Then the brothers and Chet jumped into the car, waved gaily, and headed for the distant hills. Late that night they halted at a rambling structure whose neon sign proclaimed it to be the Mountain Inn.

"And now for some real steak and potatoes!" exclaimed Chet.

During supper the boys noticed an old man watching them closely from another table.

"Wonder what's the matter with him!" Joe mused, swallowing a juicy piece of meat.

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"Maybe the trouble lies with, us," suggested his brother.

"What's the matter with anything?" queried Chet. "I never tasted a better dinner!"

Suddenly the old man summoned a waiter.

"Say, where's my cane ? " he snarled. " I put it right there beside that radiator when I came in."

The waiter stepped to the place indicated and glanced around it.

"I'm afraid it isn't here, Mr. Suttonwood."

"Isn't there!" thundered the old man. "Well, where is it? I put it there. Ask these people around here! Ask those boys!"

By this time every patron in the dining room was staring in astonishment at the eccentric old man. The waiter was plainly flustered as he approached the chums.

"I'm sorry to disturb you young men," he said, "but Mr. Suttonwood seems to have lost his cane. Have you seen it?"

"No, we haven't," Frank replied. "We've only just come in."

Mr. Suttonwood fixed his beady eyes on the lads. When Frank disclaimed any knowledge of the cane the old man jumped up.

"You're hiding it! You're hiding it!" he screamed wildly. "Waiter, I demand that these boys be searched!"

The dining room was in an uproar. A moment later the hotel manager appeared and urged his guest to follow him into his private

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office, promising to investigate the matter there.

"Golly!" exclaimed Chet when the turmoil had subsided. "That old fellow's crazy as a loon! Why should we know anything about his cane?"

"Another mystery," smiled Frank. "But let's take them one at a time. Finding Mr. Perry is our present job."

The boys left word at the hotel desk to be called at five in the morning. The sun had just peeped over the hills when they were ready to start out again.

"Just a moment," said the hotel clerk in an undertone as the older Hardy boy paid their bill. "I'd like to speak to you." He motioned Frank to follow him into an office. "Just wanted to let you know that Mr. Suttonwood called the police about that cane of his. He described you fellows and said he suspected you to be the thieves. Don't suppose anything'll come of it, but I thought I'd warn you."

Frank thanked the fellow and repeated his words to his chums.

"Oh, the old man's crazy," Joe shrugged. "If the police had intended to make trouble for na they'd be here by now, anyway."

"Just the same," said Chet, "I'll feel a lot more comfortable when we get out of this place."

As Frank turned the car into the highway a man standing on the road hailed them.

Caught! 25

"Mind giving me a lift to Johnsville?" he inquired in a pleasant voice.

"Sure-there's plenty of room," Chet announced without waiting to consult the others. Bather than risk offending the stranger, Frank agreed, though he was not particularly enthusiastic about accommodating him.

The man climbed in with Chet and chatted amiably with the fat lad until the car drew up before a traffic light. Suddenly the tone of his voice changed.

"Pull over to the curb, young fellow," he ordered curtly, tapping Frank on the shoulder.

Before any of the boys could say a word he had leaned from the car and blown three blasts on a police whistle. The Hardys were nonplussed. What was the meaning of this!

They had not long to wait for the answer. A uniformed police officer came running to the car. He touched his cap as he spied the man whom the boys had thought to be a hitch-hiker.

"Howdy, Detective Jones. What've you got here?" he queried.

"Just nabbed these boys for robbery, Williams. They stole a wad of money from an old fellow up at Mountain Inn. Look here."

The detective casually lifted the rug on the floor of the car and withdrew a gold-headed cane.

"See!" he said, and flicked open its handle.

To the horror of the chums a large roll of banknotes tumbled out.

CHAPTER IV

A SCREAM IN THE WOODS

"But, officer-----"

The detective silenced Frank with a brusque wave of his hand. "Sorry, young fellow, but there's the evidence," he said sharply. "We'll have to ask you to go back to the Inn."

The uniformed policeman took the wheel, and a few moments later they turned back into the driveway at Mountain Inn. On the veranda stood the old man, obviously expecting them.

"Ha!" he snorted as they rolled to a stop. "Caught the scoundrels, did you? Good!" He rubbed his hands together like an old miser about to count his money.

The boys were ushered quickly into the hotel manager's office, Mr. Suttonwood clumping along behind them.

"Frank! Did you see what I saw?" whispered Joe excitedly as the chums were seating themselves.

"No. What?"

"Bock and Simon! Standing there watching us from a corner of the lobby!"

Before Frank could say anything in reply the detective held up his hand for silence.

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A Scream in the "Woods 27

"All right, Mr. Suttonwood," he snapped. "Let's hear your story. Make it short, please."

The old man rasped out the incident of the night before, declaring that the Hardys had stolen his cane and hidden it in their car.

"They must have known about the trick handle and the money in it," he added, glaring at the lads.

"What about it, young fellow?" the detective demanded, turning to Frank. "What's your name, anyhow?"

"Hardy. Frank Hardy. This is my brother Joe, and that's Chet Morton. We're from Bayport."

The detective eyed the lad in surprise. "Hardy? From Bayport? Belated to Fenton Hardy, the detective?"

"He's my father."

For an instant the officer stared skeptically at Frank. Then his stern face relaxed into a broad grin.

"For goodness' sake! Put 'er there, young fellow!" He held out his hand enthusiastically. "I know your father well!"

Mr. Suttonwood rose and tottered noisily toward the door. "While you're all doing your chatting," he sneered, "I'll go out and pay the reward for the capture of these-these bandits."

"Just a minute," interrupted the detective. "Who's getting the reward?"

"Two chaps out in the lobby named Bock

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and Simon. Thanks to them, I found out about these young scamps stealing my cane!"

When the old man had stomped out the detective turned to the boys. "Tell me, Frank Hardy," he urged sympathetically, "how did you boys get into this mess?"

Frank related the events of the evening before, concluding with a mention of their previous meetings with Bock and Simon.

"I shouldn't be surprised, Detective Jones," Joe blurted out, "if those fellows deliberately planted that cane in our car. It's a cinch *somebody* did."

4' Sure," broke in Chet. " They probably did it as a practical joke. They look like the kind who would."

"Practical joke nothing!" decided Joe.

The detective pursed his lips. "I'm inclined to agree with you, now that I know who you lads are," he admitted. "I think I'd better have a talk with those chaps in the lobby. Wait here a few minutes."

He returned a quarter of an hour later, frowning.

"I'm suspicious about this Bock and his friend Simon. I don't like their looks nor the way they talk. But there's no real evidence against them just now. We '11 see what happens later. In the meantime you boys run along. Fenton Hardy's sons certainly aren't thieves, no matter what anybody says!"

The chums thanked the man warmly and went

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outside. To their surprise Bock and Simon were waiting for them.

"Golly!" muttered Chet as they approached. "Those fellows are like bad pennies; they turn up everywhere!"

"Oh, so the cops let you go!" snorted Bock as the chums came up to their car. "What do you think of that, Pete?"

"Well, the cops ain't the only fellows who *catch* people," Simon echoed. "Maybe these wise Hardys and that fat fellow there '11 get into trouble with somebody else who won't let 'em go so quick."

Had it not been for Frank's restraining hand, Joe would have lunged at one or the other of the ruffians.

"Never mind them," his brother whispered. "We've far more important things to do right now."

"All right, Frank," muttered his brother with a show of disappointment. "But I think it's just about time we told these fellows a few things!"

As the ruffians moved off the three chums once more headed their car toward their distant destination. An hour or so later Frank switched off the

engine and coasted to a stop alongside a roadside lunch-wagon.

"About time we ate!" Chet grumbled, quickly brightening as the smell of hamburgers was wafted to them. "Come on, boys. Onions on mine!"

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Lunch progressed rapidly, for the Hardy brothers were eager to get started and make up for time lost on the road. However, it became evident within a very few minutes after the last hamburger had disappeared that any driving | was out of the question for the time being.

"I'm so sleepy I could drop off right here," Chet yawned. "We got up too early."

"You're right," Joe agreed. "Let's go over to the patch of woods and have a quick snooze."

"I hate to say so, but I think the idea's a good one," Frank declared, so with Joe and Chet hanging onto the running board he nosed the car into a narrow lane leading into a clump of trees.

"There's a clearing over there," signalled Chet.

"Trust you to find us a soft place where we can lie down!" laughed Joe.

"Might as well be comfortable," grinned the stout lad. "Too bad we didn't bring some sandwiches-we could have supper here."

Frank groaned. "Golly, Chet, how can you talk about supper after eating those hamburgers !"

"Speaking of supper," said Joe, "I think we ought to be in Bailey's Landing by that time."

"We should," agreed the older Hardy lad. "We'll rest here ten or fifteen minutes and then start out. Chet can sleep in the car if he's still tired."

A Scream in the Woods 31

Their chum had already dozed off and within a few minutes the others likewise were slumbering. Suddenly Frank awoke with a start.

"Get out! Get out!" a voice was screeching.

The boy stared about him. Except for his chums sprawled out on the ground beside him, no one else was in sight.

"Hey! Get out of there!" rasped the voice again.

Frank rose to his feet in alarm. "Joel Chet! Wake up!"

"What's the matter?" mumbled the former.

"Somebody's shouting at us. I just heard a voice yelling 'Get out!'!"

Suddenly there was a blood-curdling scream. Joe and Chet sprang to their feet.

"Golly, Frank, where's it coming from?" gasped the stout lad.

"Look!" shouted Joe, pointing into the thicket.

The bent figure of an old woman, her white hair streaming out behind, could be seen darting through the underbrush not far from the clearing. A second later the strange apparition had vanished.

"Wait!" yelled Frank to the woman. "Wait! We'll help you! Come on, Joe-Chet!"

As the three boys crossed the edge of the clearing the mysterious screech rang out again.

"Leave her alone! *Leave her alone!*" it warned shrilly.

CHAPTER V

FOLLOWED!

the chums hesitated only an instant.

"Come on!" shouted Frank. "Never mind that voice. Let's find the old woman!"

"She ran this way!" Joe darted behind a large oak with the others at his heels.

"There she is!" burst out Chet. "Quick! She has fallen!"

The person in question had stumbled over a large root and lay sprawled on the ground.

"Get him!" she gasped as the boys ran up. "Catch him quickly!" The woman's eyelids fluttered shut and she sank back senseless.

"Get whom?" blinked Chet.

"I don't know," said Frank, "but you two had better look around and see if you can find out. I'll try to revive her."

The old lady's pulse and breathing continued regular, but she showed no signs of returning consciousness. A moment later the younger Hardy lad dashed up, followed by Chet.

"Can't find anything or anybody," Joe said. "How's the patient?"

"No better," replied his brother worriedly. "I think we ought to get help right away."

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With considerable difficulty the boys placed the unconscious woman on the rear seat of the car and headed for the lunch wagon not far distant. As they drew up beside a gasoline pump in front an attendant came toward them.

" Gas ? How many ? " he queried.

Quickly Frank explained that they needed help for the old woman.

"Jumpin' blazes!" cried the man, peering at the figure on the rear seat. "You've killed old Mrs. Rica! You've run over her!"

"Look here," snapped Joe, "we didn't run over her and we didn't kill her. She fainted. We want some water for her right away!"

The attendant was too excited to listen. "Afraid you're in for trouble," he jabbered. "You'd better drive her home quick!"

"I think we should get a doctor first," Frank persisted, rapidly growing impatient with the stupid fellow.

"Old man Rica *is* a doctor," returned the attendant, still gaping at the motionless figure. "Come on, I'll show you the way."

After Frank had driven the car over what seemed to be an endless network of bumpy country lanes, a large, ramshackle farmhouse suddenly came into sight near a patch of forest.

"Turn in here," ordered the attendant. "I'll go fetch the Doc."

The chums were not a little apprehensive. The whole situation seemed unbelievable. Though they had done no wrong, they sensed

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trouble. For one thing, the old lady showed no signs of returning consciousness. And now, who was this Doctor Rica, and what would happen when he should appear on the scene?

The boys had not long to wait. From behind a large barn a towering figure in riding boots and a Western hat emerged suddenly and strode rapidly toward them. Tightly clenched in his massive gloved fist the giant carried a horse-whip.

"Doctor Rica, no doubt," commented Frank, watching with growing uneasiness as the man approached.

"And not in too good a mood," added Joe.

"Give me the Mountain Inn instead of this place any time!" spluttered Chet with teeth chattering.

"What's going on here!" thundered the man as he came alongside the car. Stalking straight to the rear door he took one look at the unconscious woman and drew back with his face horribly contorted.

"Get out of there!" he screamed at the boys. "Get out of that car! You've killed my wife, you-you murderers!"

"Look out, Frank!" cried Joe.

There was a sudden shrill whistling sound followed by a sickening *crack*. Frank felt a sharp sting across the side of his neck.

Almost blinded in the face of the screeching wMp, the older Hardy lad jumped from the car tod with lowered head charged into the frenzied

Followed! 35

giant. Joe, in the meantime, ran around from the opposite side to join his brother.

"Murderers! I'll teach ye!" cried the doctor, lashing out with the heavy leather thong. "I'll teach ye to kill people!"

Almost simultaneously the brothers dived at the fellow. Quick though they were, the whip was quicker. With a searing blow on the side of his face Frank fell to the ground all but unconscious. Joe, flinging himself at the man's heavy boots, found himself trapped in a rain of stinging lashes. He hung on grimly, expecting with each succeeding blow to lose his senses.

Suddenly a shrill cry was added to the din.

"Louis! Louis! Stop that! Stop!"

The giant paused abruptly, his arm upraised. When he turned his head in the direction of the cry his jaw dropped and his eyes stared out of their sockets.

"Martha! Martha-you're-----!"

The old woman stepped from the car and hobbled toward her husband. "Louis, what've ye done?" she cackled.

The two Riccas looked at the Hardys, who were painfully picking themselves up.

" Oh, they 're bleeding!" exclaimed the woman without waiting for her husband to speak. "Come, Louis-help get them to the house. You must bandage them up. Oh! Why do you not control your temper!"

"Just one moment, Martha," rasped the physician dubiously. "What happened to you?"

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"Why were you there in the car, unconscious!"

Mrs. Eica frowned for an instant. Then she brightened. "I remember now," she said. "I was getting some food supplies at the lunch wagon on the highway when Ferdinand flew away from me into the woods. I followed him and ran all about trying to catch him. Then my heart gave out, Louis, and I must have fainted. I remember seeing some boys looking at me just before the blackness came. These boys, Louis-these boys must have been the ones!"

Frank nodded painfully. "Yes, Mrs. Ricca, we are the ones."

"And this is the thanks we get for bringing you home!" grunted Joe, wiping blood from his cheek. " Say, where's Chet ?"

A tousled head and one eye rose cautiously above the rear door of the car.

"Oh, there he is!" exclaimed Frank. "Hey, come on out, the shooting's over!"

The fat lad climbed hesitantly from the car. "Looks as if peace had been declared in a hurry," he observed dryly. "About two minutes ago I wouldn't have been standing around here for a million dollars. Whew!"

"The doctor and I are terribly sorry, but it was a misunderstanding," Mrs. Ricca explained apologetically. "My parrot Ferdinand got away and I tried to catch him. But I couldn 't," she added ruefully.

"Oh, so *that* was what we heard shrieking

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and yelling in the woods-a *parrot!*" snorted Chet.

"Wasn't that enough!" chuckled Joe. "It certainly started things humming."

"I'm awfully sorry, young fellows," said the physician awkwardly. "If you'll come inside I'll fix up those bruises." The man was obviously ill-at-ease over his hasty action of a few moments before.

When the physician had finished treating their wounds, a weird screech suddenly shattered the tranquility of the farmhouse. "Come and get me! Come and get me!" came the raucous cry repeatedly.

"Ferdinand's back!" exclaimed Mrs. Rica, "We'd better catch him for certain!"

The three chums made a dash for the door.

"There he is-over on the car!" Joe shouted, and was off like a shot with the others in close pursuit. The younger Hardy lunged just as the bird jumped from its perch on the engine hood, and the lad went sprawling in the dust. Frank, who was just behind his brother, managed to catch the parrot by one leg and soon had it well secured.

"Thank you ever so much," beamed Mrs. Eica. "Here, I'll put him in his cage. There, Ferdie-you're a bad birdie!"

Darkness was descending as the chums at length thanked the woman and took their leave, promising to stop for a visit should they ever come that way again. Footsteps sounded on

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the stony lane as the trio climbed into the car and prepared to start.

"Mind if I go back with you?" inquired a voice, and the lunch wagon attendant stepped up.

The boys were none too cordially disposed toward the fellow, but Frank decided that they might as well take Mm along since they would go by the eating place.

"I'm certainly sorry about that whippin' you got," the man mumbled apologetically when he had seated himself. " I found the old doc down feedin' his hogs and I just told him some boys had brought his wife home. Then I stayed in the pasture lookin' at the livestock and didn't know about the hidin' he gave you until just aow. Say, where you bound!"

"Bailey's Landing," Chet replied. "Know any short-cuts?"

While Chet and the attendant conversed in the back seat, Frank watched with mounting uneasiness a pair of headlights flashing in his rear-vision mirror.

"First noticed them just after we left Rica's," he told Joe in a suppressed whisper. "They've stayed close behind ever since."

A short while later Frank stopped the car at the lunch wagon and the attendant jumped out. The machine behind them, the lad noticed, did not follow them into the driveway but halted on the road several hundred feet from the entrance to the lunch wagon.

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"Much obliged for the ride!" waved the at. tendant. " Hope you '11 be back!"

"Not if we can help it," muttered Joe dryly as they started off again. Though the fellow had been agreeable on the return trip from Bica's the boys were all relieved to be rid of him and on their way again with no further interruptions in sight.

"Maybe there's somebody after us in that other car," Joe remarked suspiciously.

"They've left us," returned Frank, "at least for the time being. I saw them park at the lunch wagon when we started away."

It was close to midnight when the boys turned in at a roadside hotel for a night's lodging.

"Holy crickets!" exploded Joe as the chums were undressing. "Where's my wallet? It's not in my pocket!" He fumbled frantically through his clothing. "It's gone!" he groaned after a hurried five-minute search. "And so is the hundred dollars I had in it!"

On the highway a car was droning through the darkness. Two evil-faced young men, one of them at the wheel, were laughing scornfully.

"Lucky find, wasn't it, Ed?" rasped one.

"Sure was, Pete!" returned the other. "Good idea of yours to follow 'em to that old farmhouse. The hundred dollars sure will come in handy for us!"

"Lucky we met that lunch wagon attendant too," said Simon. "Saves us a lot of trouble, knowin' they're headed for Bailey's Landing."

CHAPTER VI

JOB DISAPPEARS

the chums searched everywhere but could find no trace of Joe's missing wallet.

"There's nothing to do but go on," said Frank at length. "Whatever else happens, we must find Dad's notes as soon as possible."

Sleep came with difficulty, and morning found them eager to be on their way.

"Just sixty miles to go," announced Frank over his bacon and eggs at breakfast.

"We ought to make it in an hour and a half," said Joe. "We'll find Mr. Perry, get Dad's notes, and be home tomorrow."

"In time for lunch," Chet hoped, plunging into his second helping of shredded wheat.

"We *hope!*" laughed Frank, little realizing as he said it what a futile desire that would be.

As the chums rode on, the mountains gradually fell behind, and tiny lagoons and inlets appeared over the terrain.

"Ocean's not far ahead," Frank observed. "According to the last sign post, Bailey's Landing is only ten miles away."

A little farther on they came to a fork in the road.

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Joe Disappears 43

"Left turn to Bailey's, the sign says," Joe called out. "Better watch out for that bridge ahead. Looks a bit rickety."

Frank swung the car up onto the planking. Suddenly there was a splintering crash and the auto stopped abruptly, leaning at a precarious

angle. The chums stared at one another, scarcely daring to breathe.

"Come on," said Frank at length. "We'd better get out pronto!"

"Carefully, you mean," Joe amended. "If one more plank gives way I've a feeling there won't be much left of us."

Gingerly the lads crawled from the car and jumped to the solid ground adjacent, heaving sighs of relief. The car, they could see, rested dangerously on its driveshaft with both rear wheels hanging below the splintered planking of the bridge structure.

"A fine mess *this* is!" muttered Joe. "Where are we going to get a derrick around here!"

"Somebody's coming," said Chet. "Maybe he'll pull us off."

A high-powered automobile rolled up to the bridge and stopped. The driver, a powerfully-built man with coarse features and iron-grey hair, leaned out.

"Go on!" he shouted impatiently. "Get out of the way! What's the idea?"

"The bridge just caved in under our car," Frank started to explain. "I wonder if you-----"

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The roar of the engine in the other car interrupted him. Quickly the big machine was turned about and was off in the direction it had come. The chums' astonishment at this act rapidly turned into anger.

"Well, of all-" Frank bit his lip in exasperation.

"Nice sort of fellow!" snorted Joe. "I hope I meet him again some time. I'll give him a piece of my mind!"

Little did Joe realize how much he would regret that wish.

"I don't see any house around here," said Frank at length. "I guess we'll just have to stay around until somebody comes along."

"I hope all the travelers we meet aren't like the last one," commented Joe dryly.

"Too bad we didn't bring something to eat," remarked Chet, mournfully consulting his watch. "It's been a long while since our last meal."

"Same old Chet!" laughed Joe. "No matter what happens, it's all right if there's food around!"

The fat lad was about to retort when the whine of a motor in the distance announced the approach of another car.

"Maybe this is the same fellow coming back," Chet suggested.

"By the looks of him, I hardly think he'd return," observed Joe. "No, it isn't," he added as the second auto swung into view around a bend. "It's of a different make."

Joe Disappears 43

A blue touring sedan came to a stop at the bridge and two well-dressed men stepped out.

"What's wrong? Have an accident?" one of them inquired pleasantly. He was tall and spare, with clean-cut features, and appeared to be in his early forties.

"The bridge gave way under our car," Frank explained.

"Well, now, look at that!" exclaimed the other. He was a short, plump man who appeared to be slightly older than his companion. "John, we'd better lend these young fellows a hand."

"We certainly will!" agreed the other heartily. "Let's have a look, Henry."

The two men accompanied the Hardys and Chet to the stranded auto and discussed ways and means of handling the situation.

"A few planks will be necessary, I think," said the plump stranger. "John, why don't you ride over to the mill and get 'em?"

When the man addressed as John had gone, his companion assisted the boys in unloading the car. This was a precarious task but one which the affable stranger declared to be necessary.

"Suppose you boys are going to Bailey's!" inquired the man casually as they worked.

"Well, yes-*we were*," laughed Frank.

"Oh, we'll get your car off all right," returned the other confidently. "Suppose you are going to watch us raise the *Carona*?"

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"The *Carona*!" Frank looked up expectantly.

"Say, that must be the job Mr. Perry came down here for!" exclaimed Joe.

"You're right," smiled the stranger. "Do you know him? He's one of our best divers."

"We met him the other day in Bayport," Frank replied. "Are you-do you-work for his company, too?"

The plump man nodded. "I'm Henry Crux. The other man is my brother John. Here he comes now with the planks."

"Golly!" commented Chet.

Joe uttered a subdued exclamation. "You *own* the company, don't you, Mr. Crux?"

"Yes, my brother and I own it. As soon as we get your car off the bridge we'll take you to the Landing and show you some real deep-sea diving."

Needless to say, the chums were delighted at their sudden good fortune. An hour later, when the car had been dragged undamaged from the bridge, their anticipation knew no bounds. After a short and rough ride with the Cruxes in the lead, they drew up in the parking lot of the Bailey Yacht Club.

"Perry's resting at his hotel," said John Crux as the boys came over to his car. "You can see him later this afternoon. In the meantime we'll show you around."

The *Carona*, once a large, expensive pleasure yacht, now lay in seventy feet of water with her side partly ripped out by an explosion. The

Joe Disappears 45

chums were taken in the company's barge to the spot where the yacht had sunk about half a mile offshore. During most of the afternoon they watched the divers at work through a telescopic device especially designed for the purpose.

John and Henry Crux took turns explaining things to them as the undersea work proceeded. In the course of a few hours the boys had learned much about the intricacies and dangers of deep-sea diving, and of the great skill required to perform such work successfully.

"Now I'm surer than ever that I want to keep my feet on dry land!" exclaimed Chet. "Look at that fellow down there. He's walking right into the hole in the boat's side. Not for me!"

The boys watched, fascinated. Suddenly there was a hail from a small motorboat approaching the scene.

"Hello! Coming aboard the barge!" rang out a stentorian voice.

"Frank! It's Mr. Perry coming aboard!" exclaimed the younger Hardy lad as the motorboat hovered alongside.

"Hello, there!" rang out the words again as its long, lanky owner climbed up onto the after-deck. "Of all things-the Hardys!"

"Mr. Perry!" exclaimed Frank. "We've been waiting for you all afternoon!"

"Well, here I am, all ready for a bath! It's my shift below, you see. Pretty long job ahead

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of us, I'm afraid. The old *Corona's* pretty well water-soaked."

While Perry was dressing in the heavy diving suit, he chatted amiably with the boys, hinting that he might be able to arrange for them to go down with him some time in the future.

"We'd like nothing better, Mr. Perry!" Joe exclaimed, while Chet backed away unenthusiastically.

"But Mr. Perry," broke in Frank, "we really came to get Dad's suit. He has some important papers in one of the pockets."

"I didn't look in the pockets!" exclaimed the diver. "The suit's at the tailor's now. I'm having a torn place mended before returning the clothes to your father with my apologies."

Frank glanced at his watch. "It's just about closing time now," he said. "I think we can make it if we hurry."

"Sorry I can't come with you," Perry apologized. "Jack'll take you to shore in the motorboat." He motioned toward a sailor.

The chums thanked John and Henry Crux for their assistance at the bridge and their hospitality during the afternoon. Then they excused themselves hurriedly.

"Walters' Tailor Shop!" called the diver as they departed. "Eight on the main street."

Back at the landing the trio jumped into their car. Following directions given them by John Crux, they arrived at the little hamlet of Bailey fifteen minutes later.

Joe Disappears 47

"There's the shop," said Joe. "Right on the corner."

Frank pulled to a stop and the boys raced to the door only to find it locked.

"Look, Frank, there's smoke in there!" exclaimed Joe suddenly.

The boys pressed their faces against the glass door. "You're right!" yelled Frank. "And Dad's suit is in there! Quick! Let's break in!"

Joe already had his foot poised, and a second later swung it heavily against the glass. There was an ear-shattering crash. Simultaneously a burst of flame issued from the rear of the shop. Before the boys had advanced a foot the whole interior was afire.

"Look out!" yelled Chet. "Cleaning fluids -they'll explode!"

Disregarding his chum's warning, Joe lowered his head into his coat and charged toward the rear of the store.

"I must get those papers," he cried.

"Come back!" screamed Frank. "Joe!"

There was a sudden terrific explosion. Frank and Chet were hurled to the sidewalk. The shop was instantly a raging inferno. Dazed though he was, the older Hardy knew that his brother never could emerge alive.

From down the street there came the whine and clang of a fire apparatus.

CHAPTER VII

A FIGHT

Frank and Chet scrambled to their feet just as the engine lumbered to a stop at the curb.

"Out of the way!" shouted a fireman, colliding with the boys as he dashed toward the shop door.

"My brother-" Frank pleaded, but was abruptly cut off by a line of smoke-eaters trundling a hose toward the door.

By this time a crowd had turned out to witness the spectacle. The little shop was a seething furnace.

Chet and Frank were shoved rudely among the onlookers behind the fire lines. Both despaired as they realized their helplessness.

"We can't stand here and do *nothing!*" Frank burst out indignantly. "Chet, you wait here. I've an idea."

"But-" Before the fat boy could finish, Frank had disappeared.

A block down the street he turned the corner. As he had hoped, he discovered an alley leading to the rear of the tailor shop. Down it he fled, his heart thumping wildly. There was just one chance-----

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A Fight 49

He uttered a cry of triumph as he caught sight of a motionless figure on the ground behind the flaming shop.

"Joe!"

His heart suddenly sank. The figure *was* motionless. The flames, billowing out in the wind, had almost reached it. Was Joe alive? No, he couldn't be after that terrific explosion!

In an instant Frank had reached his brother's side. Quickly he lifted him and dragged him out of reach of the fire. He felt for his pulse. There was none.

Desperately the lad picked up the still body and staggered through the smoke to the street. A car drew up alongside the curb.

"Need a doctor!" cried a voice.

An instant later the driver was helping Frank place his brother in the car. A siren wailed, traffic halted, and they sped away. Vaguely Frank noticed that he was in an ambulance. Lucky, he thought-but was he too late? Joe was doubtless beyond aid. White-coated internes in the hospital emergency room quickly wheeled Joe into the operating room.

"Wait here," said one of the physicians to Frank, motioning the lad toward a seat in the anteroom. A few minutes later the doctor returned.

"He's all right, young fellow. Probably will have to stay here a day or so, but you needn't worry."

Frank could hardly believe his ears. "Then

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he's not-I couldn't feel his pulse before -we brought him in!"

The physician smiled sympathetically. "He's suffering from shock, but it's not dangerous. Sometimes it's pretty hard to feel a pulse when the patient has been stunned. He'll be all right."

Gratefully Frank turned to go.

"Wait a minute," said the doctor. He went into the operating room and emerged with a pair of tattered trousers. "Your friend was holding these when you brought him in." He handed them to Frank, who stared in surprise.

"I must have been too upset to have noticed them," the lad remarked. "Thanks. I'll be back in the morning."

A short taxi ride brought him to the vicinity of the fire, which was still raging.

" Now where is Chet ?" he murmured to himself, skirting the edge of the crowd.

Suddenly a familiar voice hailed him. "Frank!" His fat chum lumbered up. "Did you-----"

"I found him! Back of the shop! Took him to the hospital. The doctors say he's suffering from shock but that he'll be all right."

"Thank goodness!" breathed the stout lad. "Say, what's that?" They both looked at the torn trousers Frank was still carrying.

"I'd almost forgotten I had them! They're Dad's. Joe was holding them- must have picked them up just before the explosion."

A Fight 51

"What about the coat?" Chet inquired hopefully.

"I'm afraid he didn't get it. Dad's going to be terribly disappointed about the notes, but I'm afraid they're gone for good."

The boys decided to engage a hotel room to be as near Joe as possible. Late that night Frank called the hospital.

"He's getting along very well," replied the nurse in answer to the inquiry. " The reporters have just left with his story. No, no more visitors tonight. You may come tomorrow."

Next morning the boys were up early.

"Look!" exclaimed Chet, pointing to a newspaper he had purchased on his way to breakfast.

Flaring across the front of the Bailey Herald was a startling headline:

SON OF FAMED DETECTIVE IS FIRE

HERO

Joseph Hardy, Bayport Youth,

Saves Valuable Papers

In Local Blaze

"Look, here's something about you and me, too!" squealed Chet as the two boys scanned the dispatch.

According to the Bailey Jerald, the three chums had broken into the shop at the height of the blaze and had managed to save their father's suit, containing valuable documents hidden in a secret pocket. The article went on to praise the boys' courage and daring, and

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concluded with a brief account of Fenton Hardy's career.

Frank was crestfallen. Joe obviously believed that he had been able to retrieve the entire suit and that the papers actually were safe. Frank wondered how he could tell his brother only the empty trousers had been recovered.

Later as Frank and Chet sat in the lobby of the City Hotel again reading the account of the fire, two shabbily-dressed young men were occupied similarly on a nearby street corner.

"Can you beat this, Pete!" snorted Ed Bock, focussing his squinty eyes on the Bailey Herald. "The Hardys run into a fire and save some of their old man's papers. Wonder which ones they are."

"Dunno," said Pete Simon, "but I imagine they're plenty important."

"Maybe we can get 'em, Pete."

He led his companion to a drug store phone booth. "Most likely they're stayin' at the City Hotel," he muttered with a sly grin. "It's the only one in town."

He phoned the establishment and asked for Frank Hardy.

"Hello. This Mr. Frank Hardy?" The ruffian quickly altered his naturally shrill voice to an oily bass. "This is the Bailey Herald. Y'eah-yes. Say, we wondered about them- those papers you rescued last night. Did you <jet'emoW What? Mistake? You didn't get

any of 'em! Oh, you didn't get the coat to the suit after all! That's too bad. No, that'll be all. G'bye."

Simon stepped from the booth, grinning triumphantly. "What do you know about that, Ed? Fooled 'em completely from start to finish! And say-they didn't get that coat after all! Maybe it's still in the shop!"

"Yeah," sniffed Bock. "Still in the shop. Why, there ain't any shop. It's all burned down!"

"Aw, you can't ever tell. Lots of times, things are left in the ashes and ain't found for weeks. Maybe we'll be lucky and stumble on it."

"Well, won't do any harm to have a look."

The two roughnecks slouched around the corner and a few moments later arrived at the ruins of what once had been a tailor's shop. To their disappointment an armed watchman motioned them away.

"Can't loaf around here, fellows," he said authoritatively. "Go on! Get goin'."

Bock and Simon shambled around the corner again. Suddenly the latter brightened. "Ed, I got the best idea yet! Come on over to that restaurant. We '11 have some coffee and I '11 tell you."

#

Shortly after darkness had fallen that evening two figures crept stealthily along the narrow alley behind the charred tailor's shop.

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Arriving at the ruins, they crouched behind the stump of the chimney.

"Did you see 'im?" queried Bock in a hoarse whisper.

"Yeah. Over by that wall. You go around that way-and don't make no noise! I '11 circle them timbers. We '11 both tackle 'im at once!"

The unsuspecting watchman suddenly found himself gagged by a hand from behind and was swept quietly off his feet by two powerful arms reaching out of the darkness.

"Tie 'im up, Ed."

"Eight. Here, stuff this rag in his mouth. O.K.? Fine. We'll drag him down, the alley to the car. Quick!"

The ruffians carried their writhing burden to their machine and dumped it into the back. Twenty minutes later they drew up into a lonely lane on the outskirts of a forest.

"Take off his uniform, Ed," snapped Simon nervously. "Hurry up!"

As rapidly as Bock divested the watchman of his clothing Simon dressed himself in it. Then the scoundrels bound the partially-clad man to a tree, stuffed handkerchiefs more tightly into his mouth, and departed.

"Do you s'pose we're too late, Ed?"

"Naw. The cops in this little jerkwater town wouldn't notice anything. If they don't see the witchman around they'll probably think he's hidin' in the chimney. Shucks, we'll be there in a minute anyhow."

A Fight 55

They reached the alley again and Simon parked the car. "Wait here, Ed, and be ready for a quick getaway!"

He stepped from the running-board and walked through the darkness to the ruins, emerging at the front sidewalk for a quick survey of the vicinity. A few pedestrians were in sight, but no policemen. Nobody appeared to be watching him.

He snapped on the button of his flashlight and began to poke through the ashes with his feet. Suddenly a car swerved around the corner and stopped at the curb. A face topped by a policeman's cap peered out.

"Everything O.K., Jake?" came a gruff query.

Simon snapped off his light and his rowdy face knotted itself into a frightened scowl. He held his breath.

"Jake's getting deafer every day!" he heard the officer say to a companion in the car, and they drove off.

Simon waited a moment, then flashed on the light again and continued sifting the ashes. Suddenly his foot came in contact with a soft, bulky object. He uttered a low exclamation and picked up a tweed coat, virtually undamaged but for water stains. He crunched the material. Inside could be heard the crackle of paper.

"Ha!" he muttered. "Hardy's coat, or my name ain't Pete Simon!"

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Just then the police car returned. This time the officer at the wheel leaped out at the curb and made for the ruins. Simon jumped behind the chimney stump, starting an avalanche of ashes and debris.

The ruffian darted into the alley, ran several yards, then turned between two stores. Presently he came out on another street, where he settled down to a hasty walk.

"Too bad I had to leave Ed in the alley with the car," he growled to himself with a crooked smile, "but I don't aim to take chances."

He walked rapidly through the shadows, slinking furtively across the glare of an occasional street light. Where he was going he was not exactly certain, so long as he put quick distance between himself and his pursuers.

Suddenly he heard the sound of running footsteps behind him. He turned quickly and peered through the gloom. Before he could dodge, a figure had collided with him.

"Oh, I'm sorr-say, aren't you Pete Simon?" The stranger's apology had changed abruptly to a sharp demand.

Simon turned to run when a strong arm pinned him to the spot. "Frank Hardy!" he hissed as he caught a close view of the other's face.

"Yes, and if I'm not mistaken that looks like my father's coat under your arm. You-----"

A crushing blow to the jaw sent Frank reeling.

CHAPTER VIII

A SECRET WARNING

quick as a flash Frank Hardy leaped back at his adversary, who ducked as the lad swung at his jaw. Simon was lightning-quick, and had the advantage of weight. He aimed a blow at the boy's throat.

This time Frank was ready with a hard punch that landed in Simon's solar plexus and sent the fellow staggering with a yowl of pain. Miraculously he recovered almost instantly and dived at young Hardy. The two rocked to the ground, with the lad underneath his opponent. Suddenly there was a shout in the darkness.

"Hold 'im, Pete-I'm comin'!" A second later Bock ran up.

"Get the coat!" Simon gasped.

His companion fumbled around on the side* walk, found the garment where it had fallen, and tossed it beyond Frank's possible reach. Then he jumped into the fray, reaching for the Hardy boy's throat. Frank lowered his chin but Bock found his windpipe and slowly squeezed it shut.

"We'll teach you to meddle with us!" he snarled.

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Pinned motionless by Simon and all but throttled by Bock, Frank suddenly went limp. Just then a chunky figure loomed up beside the combatants.

"Rats!" yelled Simon, squinting at the newcomer. "It's the fat fella. Get 'im, Ed!"

Bock loosed his hold on Frank's throat and sprang at Chet like a tiger. At the same instant the stout lad recognized Bock, and with a swiftness unusual for him, sent the ruffian sprawling with an unexpected cuff over the eye.

"Get the coat, Chet!" This time it was Frank who gasped out the order.

As the plump boy turned to obey, Bock leaped to the edge of the sidewalk. Quick as a flash he grabbed the coat, and before Chet could stop him, had disappeared in the darkness.

A police whistle screeched out and a car sped toward them, its siren wailing. Simon uttered a cry, jumped off Frank, and darted down the street. At the same instant a uniformed figure leaped from the approaching machine and brought the fleeing scoundrel to a fall with a perfect flying tackle.

The police car meanwhile had eased to a stop where Chet was helping Frank to his feet. The driver got out and approached them, playing a powerful flashlight into their faces.

"What's going on here?" he demanded gruffly. "Who are you?" The officer scanned Frank's face under the blinding glare of the light.

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"Quick, officer, we must get the other fellow!" Frank gasped.

"He stole some papers from us. He ran that way just about a minute ago!" Chet explained breathlessly.

"All right. Quick! Jump in the car and do your explaining there," rapped out the officer, motioning the boys into the auto. Just then two figures loomed up.

"Here he is, Chief," said one. Frank could see that the speaker was also a policeman, and that he had a powerful fist wrapped around Simon's coat collar.

"Take him to Headquarters," snapped the Chief. "I've got another chase on my hands."

The police car, bearing Frank and Chet, sped off in the direction Bock had taken. The two boys rapidly explained the situation to the officer.

"We'll head for the woods," decided the latter. "That's where most runaway thugs try to go first."

Twenty minutes later they rolled into a lonely lane leading into a woods on the outskirts of town.

"All right, boys," said the policeman. "Let's have a look around. You-----"

"What's that!" interrupted Frank. "Listen!"

A faint cry came from the underbrush near

by.

"Well. I'll be-" The official played his light

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in the direction of the sound. "Follow me, boys!" A second later he uttered a sharp exclamation.

There, bathed in the flashlight rays, was a partly-stripped figure, gagged and bound to a large tree.

"Jake!" the officer exclaimed. He strode over and tore the handkerchiefs from the unfortunate man's mouth.

"Thank heaven!" gasped the fellow, taking a deep breath. "Chief, you got here just in time! I was suffocating!"

Quickly they untied him. "Jake's one of our special officers," the Chief explained to the boys. "He was on duty as watchman where that fire was last night at the tailor shop. What happened to you, Jake? Where's your uniform?"

On the way back to Headquarters the elderly watchman told his story. "Dunno who could have done it," he concluded, "unless it was a couple of rowdy-lookin' fellows I chased away from the ashes in the afternoon. Come to think of it, *it might have been!*" He described Bock and Simon as he remembered their appearances.

"We caught a fellow tonight," said the Chief. "Maybe he's one of them."

The watchman was given some clothes at the police station and the group, including Frank and Chet, were ushered into the Chief's private

office. Simon, bruised and disheveled, was sit-

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ting in the rear of the room, manacled to a policeman.

"That's one of 'em!" exclaimed the watchman. "I couldn't forget *that* face!"

Simon scowled blackly and squirmed in his chair.

"I never saw you before!" he croaked.

"Then where'd you get that uniform?" demanded the Chief. Simon looked guiltily at the brass-buttoned jacket he was still wearing and said nothing.

"All right," snapped the Chief with a gesture of dismissal. "We'll hold this fellow for tomorrow's line-up. You young men," he indicated Frank and Chet, "give me your addresses in case I need you later."

On the way back to their hotel the boys stopped at the hospital and to their delight found Joe ready to leave. He was still somewhat weak from his experience but the hospital authorities assured Frank that his brother would gain back his strength rapidly.

"Ana now," commenced Joe as the trio seated themselves in a taxi, "I'd like to know what's going on around here. You two look as if you'd been under a couple of steam rollers!"

Frank had postponed telling his brother of the missing coat and papers, but now he was forced to inform him.

"And to think I bungled the whole job!" Joe muttered disconsolately when Frank had finished. "Why. I was *sure* I had managed to

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grab the whole suit. I remember picking it up just before the flames reached the back of the shop. Then, well, I don't remember anything else until I woke up in the hospital, and the attendants told me I'd brought along some extra clothes in my fist!"

"Never mind," consoled Frank. "You did your best. Personally, I'm thankful that you got out alive."

"At least the coat wasn't burned up," Chet added. "We still have a chance to get it, and the notes, too!"

The boys turned in early, planning to arise at dawn and commence an exhaustive search for Bock. The first thing Frank saw when he opened his eyes next morning was a slip of paper under the door of their room. He jumped out of bed and scanned it hurriedly.

"Joe! Chet! Wake up!"

"What's wrong?" queried his brother, rising up in alarm.

"A note! 'Leave town at once or there'll be trouble!' it says. Written in pencil. No signature. Look!"

He handed the message to Joe, who in turn passed it to Chet.

"Bock and Simon, I'll bet a million!" the younger Hardy lad blurted out.

"Why don't those roughnecks forget us for a change!" whined the stout boy.

"They're certainly out to make trouble for us," Frank agreed.

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"But it couldn't be from both of them," Joe observed. "Simon's in jail."

"Bock's probably acting for Simon too," decided his older brother. "They're two of a kind."

Just then there was a sharp knock on the door, and Perry strode in. "Hello, everybody!" he exclaimed heartily. "Sorry to call so early but I have to get down to the landing shortly. How are you, Joe ? I heard about the fire."

The diver sat down while the brothers recounted their recent experience, mentioning particularly their trouble with Simon and Bock. During the course of his remarks Frank happened to mention the episode at the bridge and the stranger who had refused to be of help.

"Sounds like Gus Kuntz from your description, " Perry commented. " Besides, I Ve heard that he was snooping around the landing that morning."

"By the way, there's one thing Frank hasn't told you yet, Mr. Perry," Joe remarked. "Bock and Simon have made threats to us about having your life-line cut."

Perry's face became grave. "I've been afraid of something like that," he said gloomily. "I never knew this Bock fellow or his friend Simon. Gus Kuntz, I'm sure, has been carrying that idea around in the back of his mind for some time."

Frank shook his head sympathetically. "If

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there 's any way in which we can help you," he said, "we'll certainly do everything we can."

A knock at the door interrupted them. A messenger appeared and handed Joe a telegram.

"From Dad," said the younger Hardy lad as he closed the door. "Listen. 'Regret must leave for West on important case. Please find papers at once and forward.' " He dropped the message on a table. ""We're certainly not of much help to Dad," he muttered disconsolately.

Perry frowned. "I really feel responsible for all this. I took the suit in the first place."

"Please don't think that, Mr. Perry," Frank said. "You're certainly not to blame."

A few moments later the lanky diver took leave of the chums, urging them to meet him at the landing later if possible.

"Fellows, I've just had an idea!" Frank exclaimed after Perry had left.

He picked up the phone and asked for Police Headquarters. After a moment's conversation with the desk sergeant he turned to his brother and Chet.

"Simon is being held under \$2500 bail," he said excitedly. "Bock will probably try to raise the money, and-----"

"Gus Kuntz will be the man he'll get it from!" finished Joe enthusiastically.

"Right! Of course, we may be wrong. But We know that Kuntz is the owner of a success-

A Secret Warning 65

ful corporation. We also know that he's friendly with Simon and Bock, or they've given us that impression."

"Then the thing to do is to find Kuntz and stay on his trail until Bock tries to get in touch with him," Joe declared.

"Exactly," Frank agreed. "And I think I know how we can do it. You and Chet stay here until I get back."

Though the younger Hardy lad protested violently against being left in the hotel room, Frank overruled him, knowing that Joe had not fully regained his strength. Frank did not wait for the elevator, but took the steps down two at a time.

"Is there a Mr. Gus Kuntz registered here?" he inquired anxiously at the hotel desk.

"Boom 313, Mr. Hardy. Do you wish to see him?"

Frank could hardly suppress his excitement. Briefly he explained that he wanted to engage a room next to that of Kuntz. The clerk by this time was well acquainted with Frank as the son of the famous detective, and handed over the key to 315 without question.

The lad signalled for the elevator. A minute later he let himself into the unoccupied sleeping quarters. Then he stood stock still and listened intently.

His hunch had been miraculously correct. From the adjacent room he could hear the sound of a man's voice ringing out excitedly.

CHAPTEE IX

A LEAP IN THE DARK

suddenly the voice ceased abruptly and a phone receiver clicked on its hook.

"Shucks!" Frank muttered, disappointed. "Too late!"

Nevertheless he sat down on the floor close to the door separating him from Kuntz 's room. An instant later the jangle of the phone bell sent a thrill of anticipation through him.

"Hello!" rasped the voice near him. "This *you* again? I tell you, Bock, I can't give you the money! No! What's that?"

An interval followed during which Frank could hear only a faint crackle. Presumably it came from the individual at the other end of the line. Suddenly the voice in the next room burst out again.

"All right, all right, I'll advance the bail. But it's a mighty stupid idea. Why don't you fellows keep out of trouble? Where? By the old mill? Midnight tonight? Very well." There occurred the sound of the receiver crashing onto the hook, immediately followed by a muttered curse.

Breathless with excitement, Frank tiptoed

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A Leap in the Dark 67

from the room, took the elevator to his own floor, and burst in on Chet and Joe. "Boys- we're hot on the trail!" he shouted exultantly while the others stared at him wonderingly.

"Well?" said Joe impatiently.

"I was pretty certain Kuntz would be staying here," explained the older Hardy lad. "It's about the only place in town. Sure enough he was! I took the room next to his-----"

"Next to Kuntz?" queried Chet.

"Eight. He's down in 313. I thought by chance I might hear him talking to Bock, and by golly that's just what happened! Bock called him up. I could

hear every word Kuntz said!"

Eapidly Frank related what he had heard of the one-sided conversation. The chums, full of excitement, quickly laid their plans.

Luckily the desk clerk knew the old mill very well. "But it'll be hard to direct you to it," he said. "It's buried pretty deep in the woods west of town. Look. I '11 draw you a diagram."

Ten minutes later the chums emerged with a makeshift map in Frank's pocket. Impatiently they awaited the approach of darkness, and after a hasty supper piled into their car and headed toward the forest two miles away.

"Gosh, it's certainly black here!" murmured Chet, peering around as they approached the woods. "Did anybody remember to bring along a few flashlights?"

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"Right here in the dashboard cabinet," replied Frank. "Say, if I'm not mistaken, Chet, this is the same lane we were in before."

The car headlights revealed a narrow, rutty path, hardly more than a wagon track, just ahead.

"I believe you're right, Frank," the stout lad said weakly. "I didn't dream we'd have to come in here again!"

"What kind of a detective do you think you'll make, Chet?" taunted the younger Hardy lad.

"None, I hope!" exclaimed Chet with emphasis. "But it looks as if I'd have to be one so long as you two are around."

The auto swerved and jolted violently as Frank nosed it into the lane. "I think we'd better walk from here," he suggested. " Pretty rough going."

"Let's hide the car in that thicket," said Joe. " Don't forget Bock and Kuntz will probably come along this way, too."

After a bit of delicate maneuvering, Frank brought the car to a standstill behind a large tree, well out of sight of the lane. Joe opened the dashboard

cabinet and withdrew three flashlights. "Here, one for each of us. Now let's have a look at the clerk's map."

"Here's the lane," said Frank, indicating a pencilled line with his finger. "We're supposed to find a trail branching off by a sycamore tree. We follow it to the mill, about half a mile,"

A Leap in the Dark 69

Suddenly there was a loud thrashing in the underbrush.

"What's that?" gasped Chet in alarm.

Frank reached for a stone in the path and flung it in the direction of the sound. A startled rabbit leaped from the thicket and scurried past them.

"A tiger!" laughed Joe.

The plump boy muttered a sheepish retort. "You wait, Joe Hardy," he warned, grinning at the same time. "Maybe we'll see a tiger yet!" Chet came closer to the truth than even he thought.

After a search of several minutes' duration Frank suddenly gave a shout. "Here's a trail mark!" he cried. The others stumbled through the underbrush to his side.

"Right here on this tree-see it?" The lad pointed his spotlight toward a place on the trunk where the bark had been skinned.

"By golly!" exclaimed Chet. "This is the same tree the watchman was tied to!"

"I believe it is," Frank agreed. "Now, the question is, where does the trail lead from here?"

Another search finally revealed the vague markings of what had once been a footpath. With Frank as a guide, the chums plunged into the depths of the forest.

"Say, this is work!" burst out Chet, stumbling over a root.

"It's good for you!" laughed back Joe.

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"It'll take off some of that excess poundage of yours!"

"I can think of lots better ways," came the retort.

Suddenly Frank halted abruptly. "Turn off your lights!" he whispered. "Listen!"

"Running water!" Joe cocked an ear intently.

"Must be the mill!" exclaimed Chet.

"*Quiet!*" Frank ordered softly. "Might be somebody there already."

"We'd better keep the lights off now," Joe whispered.

Stealthily, scarcely daring to breathe, the three lads felt their way through the underbrush. Suddenly Frank stopped again. "Look!" he whispered hoarsely.

Just ahead, almost completely buried in the thick overgrowth, loomed the outline of a building. The gurgle of water near by was unmistakable. This must be the old mill. Not another sound could be heard, and no light was visible.

"What time is it, Chet?" Frank asked softly.

Chet peered at his radium dial. "Twenty minutes to twelve."

"Good! We haven't long to wait. Let's get a little closer and find a window."

The boys edged nearer. "Look!" Joe pointed through a large bush. "Isn't that a light?"

The others strained their eyes intently, and

A Leap in the Dark 71

discovered that they were only a few feet from a glass pane. Through it there came a faint gleam.

"Must be a light in another room," murmured Frank. "Let's go to the opposite side of the building and find out."

Cautiously the chums crept around the old structure. Once Chet stumbled, and the crunch of dried twigs and brambles sounded like gunshot.

"Chet! *Please* be real careful!" admonished Frank again.

Suddenly, as the lads moved from behind an intervening tree trunk, the outline of a dimly-lighted window cut the blackness before them. All three shrank back instinctively. Then Joe advanced a few inches and raised himself on tiptoe.

"Bock!" he exclaimed in a hoarse whisper, "There's Bock!"

Frank peered over his brother's shoulder. Unmistakably the figure lying on an old blanket in the room was that person. The sputtering light of a candle illuminated his features fitfully.

The chums watched intently. Suddenly the figure stirred. The ruffian sat up abruptly and looked at his watch. Then he settled back and closed his eyes.

"We'd better stay right here," Frank decided. "Kuntz ought to arrive any minute." The boys sank back into the dense foliage.

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Suddenly a sprinkling of light filtered through the brush, while from a distance the roar of a powerful motor could be heard.

"Kuntz!" breathed Joe. His brother nodded.

The hum of the motor came nearer, then abruptly ceased. The chums sat alert, straining to hear the slightest sound that followed.

A crackle in the thicket near by startled them, and an instant later a tall figure stormed through the undergrowth scarcely a dozen feet away. The man strode to a door which the boys had not noticed, collided with it heavily, then disappeared into the mill. A moment later he bobbed up at the window, silhouetted in the candle light.

"Kuntz?" wondered Joe in suppressed excitement.

"Must be," responded his brother. "Same fellow who didn't help us at the bridge, isn't he?"

A heavy voice boomed out. "Asleep, eh?"

The boys could see Kuntz shake the figure on the blanket. Bock suddenly sat up and rubbed his eyes.

"You can find the money somewhere else!" stormed the giant diver. "I come all the way out to this jumping-off place and find you asleep!"

They could see Bock protesting, then pleading, as the huge man paced to and fro.

"Listen. Kuntz, if you'll advance the money

A Leap in the Dark 7&

I'll show you something you might be interested in," Bock said a moment later with a sly smile. Due to the dilapidated walls of the ancient structure both voices were plainly audible to the listening chums.

The diver ceased his pacing and glared at Bock. "Well?" he demanded.

"Look at this!" The ruffian reached under a rickety table and pulled out a tweed coat.

Joe gave a start. "It's Dad's!" he exclaimed, almost forgetting to whisper in his excitement.

"Sssssh!" Frank cautioned. "If they hear us-----"

The diver's heavy voice interrupted him. "Well, what's that?" he demanded, still glaring at Bock.

The culprit reached his hand into the jacket and brought out a bundle of papers encircled by a rubber band.

Joe exploded. " I 'm not watching any longer -I'm going to get Dad's notes!"

With a sudden leap he sprang from the thicket. His brother acted quickly. Almost simultaneously he jumped after Joe and caught his arm. "Joe!" he whispered hoarsely. "Wait, Joe! We '11 get it a better way!"

Reluctantly the lad allowed his brother to lead him back into their hiding place in the thicket. Kuntz's booming voice interrupted them for an instant.

"Well!" he exclaimed, smiling unpleasantly,

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"this is the first time you ever stole anything worth while, Bock. Some of Fenton Hardy's important papers, eh? All right, I'll advance Simon's bail. But first let's have a look and see what's here." The two men settled down at a ramshackle table, drawing the candle on it closer.

"Frank!" Joe pleaded. "Let's do some-ihing-*quick!*"

"You get to Kuntz's car," said Frank, "and hold down the horn. That will bring out both of them. I'll jump through the window, grab the papers, and meet you at the hotel! Chet can go with you."

Joe needed no second invitation. Followed by Chet, he made his way rapidly through the underbrush. A few minutes later an ear-shattering blare filled the silent forest. Kuntz and Bock jumped as if they had been shot. Both hesitated an instant, then dashed from the room.

Frank lost not a single second. With a stout branch he had selected for the purpose he smashed the window pane and bounded into the room. Just as he snatched the papers he heard a bellow of rage.

The giant diver was lunging at him through the doorway!

CHAPTER X

ON THE BOTTOM

meanwhile Joe kept his hand on the horn button of Kuntz's car, with Chet standing guard near by. At any moment now the younger Hardy lad expected that the diver and Bock would burst out upon him. In the interim he prayed that Frank's plan to get their father's papers would work. Suddenly a snapping of underbrush joined the din of the horn.

"Joe! They're coming!" yelled Chet.

The words had hardly left the fat lad's mouth when the bushes parted, revealing a shadowy figure on the edge of the clearing where the car was parked. Abruptly Joe removed his hand from the horn button and an eerie silence followed.

The newcomer crouched and remained motionless. Joe was not certain whether he was Bock or Kuntz, or whether both of them were merged in that vaguely-outlined blotch.

Suddenly there was a muffled roar in the direction of the mill, followed by the faint tinkle of falling glass. An instant later there came a loud thrashing in the brush. Joe decided it must be now or never.

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"Chet! Run!" he cried.

At the same instant he bounded from the running-board of Kuntz's car and made for the thicket. The crouched figure at the edge of the clearing was too quick for him. Vaguely Joe saw something dark hurtling toward him. An instant later he was felled by a violent impact with Bock, whose hand went around the Hardy lad's throat.

"So it's you!" snarled the ruffian as Joe writhed beneath him. "I thought so!"

The lad, still weak from the effects of the explosion at the tailor's shop, nevertheless struggled valiantly. He knew that unaided he would be no match for Bock, who seemed to be singularly adept at shutting off a victim's windpipe. He felt himself growing faint, then suddenly he saw a hand appear out of the darkness and encircle Bock's chin. Another twisted the ruffian's fingers loose from Joe's throat. In a twinkling Bock rose in the air and landed with a sickening thud and a yell of agony.

For an instant Joe could not figure out what had happened. Then he saw Bock squirming on the ground with Chet on top of him.

"Good work, Chet!" he panted. "Hold him if you can. I'm afraid we have another problem on our hands!"

As he spoke, the huge figure of Kuntz loomed up in the clearing. In the brief second that the eriant hesitated to take in his surroundings, Joe sprang at him. The diver bellowed with sur-

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prised rage as the Hardy lad's tackle brought him neatly to the ground.

Joe was well aware of his predicament now. It would be only a matter of moments before the powerful man would free himself. The Hardy boy had only one object in mind, and that was to gain time so that his older brother might make a getaway with the precious papers.

Chet meanwhile had his hands full. Though the stout lad was strong, his opponent was lean and quick. The two rolled over and over, Bock fighting desperately, Chet doing his best to pin the ruffian down.

Suddenly there came a wild roar from the adjacent thicket and a huge animal leaped into the clearing, its fangs bared. Kuntz and Bock screamed. The diver gave Joe a cuff over the ear that sent the lad sprawling a dozen feet away, and himself bounded toward a tree with the animal at his heels. Miraculously his outstretched hands touched a projecting limb, and a second later he had swung himself out of danger.

Disappointed, the animal turned. Bock was running frantically toward the thicket. The creature barked frenziedly and lunged at the fugitive. Bock yowled as he felt a snap on his ankle. With a desperate jerk he tore himself

free, collided with a tree-trunk, and disappeared in an overhanging tangle of foliage.

Joe instinctively lay motionless. The animal

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was a dog; there was no doubt about that. The lad knew that as long as he remained quiet he would be unmolested.

The animal was now running to and fro between the two trees, barking excitedly. The diver cursed loudly.

"That's one of those Hardy fellows I told you about, Kuntz," said Bock in a quavering voice from his refuge near by. "They're in with Perry-the whole bunch is out to frame you!"

The big man was fairly beside himself with anger. Every time he made the slightest movement the dog would leap for the tree he was in.

"Cursed mongrel!" he growled. "You just wait, you young scamp!" he hurled at Joe.

The Hardy lad could barely suppress a smile at the predicament of the two. As for himself, he was not in the least afraid of dogs, and after the animal's first excitement had died down he arose slowly. The beast growled suspiciously, then loped over and stood still, wagging its tail.

"Irish wolfhound," Joe decided. "Beautiful dog, and what a whopper! Wonder who owns him?"

Now that he had made friends with the beast, his next move was to slip away and meet Frank. He hoped the dog would remain on guard long enough to give him the chance. While he hesitated, Bock began to whimper.

"It's my ankle, Mr. Kuntz. That mutt bit it. Gosh-it's bleedin'."

On the Bottom 79

" Oh, shut up!" snapped the diver. " What's your ankle compared with those papers you let that young rascal get away with!"

Joe's heart leaped. From the diver's words it was evident that Frank had escaped. Probably his brother was waiting for him right that minute, back at the Hardys' car. He eased himself into the thicket, hoping desperately that the dog would not follow him.

"Oh, runnin' away, eh?" scoffed Bock.

"Keep quiet!" rapped the diver irritably. "He won't get far!"

To Joe's dismay the dog pricked up its ears and shambled over to him. As he did so, Kuntz cautiously extended a foot alongside the tree trunk and felt for a lower limb. He let himself down, inch by inch, making no sound as he did so. Suddenly his shoe snapped off a twig. With a vicious snarl the dog turned and charged toward the man.

At that instant Joe disappeared. Fortunately his flashlight was still intact. He snapped it on and plunged exultantly through the woods in the direction of their car. After twenty minutes of floundering around in the dense foliage he heard a shout.

"Joe?"

"Right! Where are you?"

"Over here!" A light flashed in the darkness, and a minute later Frank was shaking his brother's hand.

"Did you get the papers, Frank?"

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"Certainly did! A little torn in the rush but otherwise intact." He showed his brother a bulky packet.

"Say, where's Chet!" queried Joe, suddenly remembering his chum whom he had not seen since the dog had interrupted their fight.

"Eight here!" came a weak cry from the bushes, and the stout lad stumbled up to the car. "Golly, I thought I'd never get here! My light wouldn't work, and say! who said there aren't any tigers in these woods! If that thing wasn't a tiger it was the next thing to it!"

Joe laughed. "I thought probably you'd make that mistake, Chet. No, it was just an ordinary Irish wolfhound."

"You can call it what you like," retorted the plump boy indignantly, "but when I see things like that jumping around in the middle of the night in the woods, I leave!"

As the chums piled into their car and headed for town, Frank listened to Joe's tale and then told his own.

"Kuntz came back into the room just as I was grabbing the papers," he said. "There wasn't anything for me to do but to jump out of that window. Believe me, that was a job, with Kuntz right at my heels and the window full of jagged glass."

"Then what?"

"Just as I leaped a large dog sprang at me, no doubt the same one you fellows saw. I tore away as fast as I could but I knew I'd have

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to find a tree in a hurry. Kuntz in the meantime must have decided not to go through the window, for I didn't see him after that."

"How did you get away?" broke in Chet. "I think I'd have dropped dead on the spot!"

Frank smiled. "I just sat there as still as I could and finally the dog went away. Then I climbed down-and here I am!"

Chet mopped his brow. "I don't know about you fellows, but personally I've had enough excitement for tonight. Let's get to bed."

Upon their return to the hotel, the boys asked for their key.

"Special delivery letter for Mr. Frank Hardy," announced the clerk, eyeing the disheveled lads wonderingly.

Frank tore open the message. "It's from Dad," he said. "He wants to know why we haven't sent his papers yet. Says he's about to lose his case. Thank goodness, we've found them!"

"We'd better forward them right away by air mail," Joe suggested. The clerk gave them a large envelope and the packet was dispatched immediately.

"Golly, that's a relief!" sighed Frank. "And incidentally, now that we've done what Dad wanted us to, why shouldn't we stay in town for a few days and watch the diving?"

Joe was highly enthusiastic and even Chet admitted that he would like to watch it. Accordingly, the chums turned out early the next

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morning and drove straight to the landing. Perry met them at the dock.

"Hear the news?" he greeted. "Simon's out on bail!"

"Out on bail!" exclaimed the brothers together. "Why, how-----"

"Somebody brought in the money early this morning, I hear," Perry explained. "Anyhow, he's out."

"Well," Joe suddenly remarked with a sly smile, "did *you* hear the news, Mr. Perry?" The diver listened intently as Joe related the chums' adventure of the previous night.

"Good work!" Perry exclaimed when the younger Hardy lad had finished. "You fellows certainly are born detectives! I couldn't have done half as much if I'd tried my best."

"And we couldn't dive for sunken ships if we wanted to," laughed Joe. "At least, not unless we'd had a few lessons first!"

Perry smiled. "All right," he declared, "you're going to have one right now!"

"What do you mean?" Frank demanded eagerly. "May we really-----"

"John Crux gave me permission to let you go down if you want to."

"Want to!" Joe exploded. "Just give us the chance!"

Excitedly the chums followed Perry to the outer edge of the long pier, nearly a quarter of a mile off-shore. A miniature derrick had been set up

overhanging the water, and a large

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air pump stood adjacent. "Wires, cable and ropes of all sizes and descriptions were strewn about in what appeared to Frank to be a hopeless tangle. A group of deckhands had gathered to assist as the diver arrived with his friends.

"Look, Frank, there's the suit!" Joe exclaimed.

"See those lead weights!" cried his brother. "And the shoes! Joe, remember the shoes I told you about? There they are!"

"You'll look like Sir Launcelot in that helmet!" Chet drawled.

"Sir Launcelot couldn't do much riding in *that* helmet!" laughed Perry. "It weighs about sixty pounds!"

If the chums had been less interested in what was going on they would have seen two coarse looking men dressed in the rough clothes of deckhands, lurking near by on the pier. Both were watching the boys intently, now and then muttering to each other.

"Now's our chance, Ed," smirked one of them at length.

"Wait, Pete, I got a better idea, but we'll have to work fast. Listen!" He whispered something into his companion's ear, and a cruel smile spread slowly over Ed Bock's crooked features.

"That'll fix him!" he hissed. "Frank Hardy'll never come out of that water alive!"

CHAPTER XI

THE CARONA IS RAISED

The older Hardy lad nodded and smiled. As Perry barked a series of bristling orders the dockhands milled around the heavy suit.

"Just sit tight, Frank," grinned the diver, noting his young friend's confusion. "We'll do your dressing for you."

The men struggled with the weighty apparel, and thirty minutes later Frank found himself encased in armor.

"Golly, I can't move an inch!" he laughed, trying to lift his foot and finding the manoeuvre all but impossible.

"You look like somebody from the planet Mars," Joe smiled a bit enviously. "I wish you could see yourself in a mirror!"

Perry stepped up to give last-minute instructions.

"Remember, you'll have two lines, a lifeline and an air hose. Pull the lifeline three times when you're ready to come up, or just holler into the telephone mouthpiece in your helmet."

"Oh, I'm to have a telephone too!" exclaimed Frank.

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The diver nodded. "Yes, but you may not feel much like talking on your first dive, for you'll be too busy making sure you can breathe. That's the experience most of us had on our initial trip."

Perry turned to a group of assistants fumbling with the helmet. "All ready, boys. Bring over the lid!"

Suddenly Joe, who had been wandering about to inspect the strange looking headgear, burst from the knot of workmen and came running to the diver.

"Mr. Perry! The air hose is cut!" he called.

The man uttered an ejaculation and bounded over to the helmet. One quick look at the damaged apparatus showed him that Joe's statement was correct.

"Who did that I" he thundered. "Who cut that hose?"

The workmen were silent.

"Must've just happened," muttered an elderly helper, apparently the foreman. "I inspected it not ten minutes ago and it was all right then."

The diver glared from one to another of the assistants. Several gulped in embarrassment but none of them spoke.

Perry's eyes blazed. "Well, *somebody* here did it!" he exploded. "It didn't cut itself!" He picked up the hose disgustedly. "A nice, slick job, too," he muttered.

"Must have been a pretty sharp blade to

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have done that," Joe observed. "The hose doesn't even gap open unless you bend it a certain way. I just happened to do that by chance a minute ago."

"It's mighty lucky you noticed it before your brother was down there breathing water instead of air," Perry replied.

"Say, what's going on over there!" came an impatient cry. Frank, unable to move in his heavy suit, had been sitting by himself on the opposite side of the pier.

Perry came over, scowling blackly, and explained what had happened.

"I'm afraid that spoils your dive for today," he said. Then he clenched his fists. "If I knew who did that-" Suddenly he stared at Frank, and the two burst out almost in the same breath, "Bock and Simon!"

"Or Kuntz," Perry amended a second later. "Still, I can't understand how they could have done it. I didn't see any strange faces around here this

morning."

Catching the eye of the elderly dock foreman who was still gazing in bewilderment at the helmet, Perry summoned him.

"Tom, did you see anybody you didn't know around here this morning? Someone not in your gang?"

The foreman ran a finger across his stubbly chin.

"Well, now that you mention it, Mr. Perry, there *was* a couple of fellows hanging around

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watching us a little while ago. I thought they belonged to the boathouse gang, for that's what they said when I asked 'em."

Frank returned the diver's significant look. "I think we've found the answer, or at least a good clue," he declared. "I'll bet dollars to doughnuts that those two loafers were Bock and Simon dressed up as boathouse laborers."

By this time Joe had joined the others.

"Personally," he observed, "I think Gus Kuntz is back of the whole thing."

"I believe you're right," agreed Perry. "I was thinking the same thing."

"Listen," said Frank suddenly, "isn't it high time for us to gather all the evidence we can find and pack Kuntz off to prison where he belongs?"

" Good idea!" Joe burst forth. " If he is the character we think he is, we shouldn't hav» much trouble convincing the authorities about him."

"Easier said than done," Perry said dejectedly. "Kuntz is nobody's fool. He's a crafty fellow and takes precautions. He has engineered any number of shady deals against our company, we're sure, but we've never been able to get any evidence. I've not had a chance to prove that he has made attempts on my life, but he has, down on the ocean bottom where there was nobody around to witness it."

"I think we can do it!" Frank insisted.

The chums had ample time to speculate on

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the matter while Perry and his assistants discussed repairs to the damaged air hose. The man fretted at the delay.

"Is time important in raising the *Corona*, Mr. Perry?" Frank inquired.

"Very!" the man returned. "The owner is impatient. When he finds out about the broken hose, which will set us back several days, I'm afraid he'll switch the job to Kuntz."

"And that's just what Kuntz is waiting for!" Joe exclaimed. "I see it all now! Trying to drown Frank was just a small part of his scheme. His real object is to have your company discredited because of the delay, thereby getting the contract for himself."

"Exactly," said Perry. "Now you have an idea as to just how Gus Kuntz operates."

Since there was nothing more for them to do at the moment the chums returned to their hotel, promising to be on hand early the next 'lay. Joe purchased a newspaper and took it to their room.

"Look!" he exclaimed suddenly, staring at a headline.

"What now?" queried Chet.

" 'Valuable Dog Found Dead in Forest,' it says!" the younger Hardy read aloud. "Why, I'll bet-" He scanned the column hurriedly. "Yes, it's the same one! Listen to this, fellows!"

He read a dispatch stating that a thoroughbred Irish wolfhound belonging to Mr. Eiggs,

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wealthy owner of the sunken yacht *Carona*, had been found dead near the Old Mill early that morning. Tire marks on the ground alongside the

carcass, the report said, indicated that the animal probably had been run down by a car.

"So that explains the situation!" Frank exclaimed. "I've been wondering all day how Bock and Kuntz managed to get away in time to advance Simon's bail this morning."

"One of them must have attracted the dog's attention while the other got to the car," was Joe's analysis. "Then he ran over the animal, killed it, and the rascals got away."

"Pretty fancy bit of driving, I call it," drawled Chet.

The sudden jangle of the telephone bell interrupted the conversation. Frank answered it.

"Hello? Oh, hello, Mr. Perry. What?"

It was obvious from the crackle in the receiver that the diver was highly agitated. Frank was frowning. When the man had hung up, the elder Hardy lad turned to his chums.

"Mr. Perry says Mr. Riggs, the *Carona's* owner, is up in the air about the delay with the hose and is breaking the contract to give it to Kuntz!" he said with a white face.

Joe's jaw was set. "The only thing that will save both Perry and the Crux Brothers now is to tell Mr. Biggs about the episode of the dog."

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"Eight, Joe. Look tip the man's address in the phone book and we'll go right over!"

A butler in the large white mansion on the outskirts of town eyed the boys disapprovingly.

"You wish to see Mr. Eiggs?" he scowled. "Whom shall I sayf" he asked haughtily.

Frank told his name. When the servant heard it his manner changed abruptly to one of astonished respect.

"Come this way, Mr. Hardy," he purred. "Mr. Eiggs is in the library."

The boys found the millionaire at his desk, a portly, ruddy-faced man with a genial smile. To the chums' surprise he, too, seemed to be familiar with the name Hardy.

"Yes, yes!" he beamed. "I've read about you lads in the papers. Some firemen, aren't you?" he chuckled. "And of course I know of your father. Come and sit down. What can I do for you?"

Frank briefly stated the nature of their visit. At mention of the wolfhound the millionaire's face fell. Then he looked up, startled.

"What's that you say? You know who killed my dog?"

"We have reason to believe that a man by the name of Gus Kuntz ran over him, Mr. Eiggs," Frank stated quietly.

"Kuntz? The diver?" demanded the yachtsman, frowning.

Frank nodded. Without mentioning the Details which the boys naturally wished to keep

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to themselves, he told briefly how the dog had treed Kuntz and a companion. He concluded by relating the suspicious circumstances surrounding the damaged air hose.

The millionaire's fist thundered on his desk when Frank had finished. "If I ever see that man Kuntz again-" he fairly shouted. Then he became calm again. "Pardon me, boys, I shouldn't have let myself go like that. But I prized that dog more than I can say. He was my best friend."

The chums waited in sympathetic silence as Eiggs gazed sorrowfully at a beautiful oil painting of the animal on the opposite wall. At length he arose and stretched out his hand.

"Thank you for telling me, boys," he said. "Ard-don't worry about the diving contract. I'll see that your friends keep it."

Exultantly the lads piled into their car and made off toward the hotel. Ten minutes later Perry, on the telephone, was exclaiming joyously over

their good fortune, bidding them once again to be at the pier early the next morning.

The chums did not retire immediately, even though it was nearly midnight. Instead, they sat up working out another plan which Frank proposed, for they were well aware that Kuntz and his confederates would attempt something even more desperate, now that their first scheme had failed.

CHAPTER XII

A VISIT TO THE ASYLUM

Two days later, a man with a thin unpleasant face lounged alongside the Crux Brothers* diving barge. None of the workmen scurrying around appeared to notice him, but he watched every activity intently.

At length the barge pilot gave the order to sail. There was a rattle of chains, the sharp *lup* of heavy rope slithering along the deck, and the long-drawn-out hoot of the whistle mingling with the cries of dock-hands and seamen. Then the vessel eased slowly from the pier, pointing her bow toward a distant buoy riding the long swells on the horizon.

The lounge spat disgustedly and sidled away toward a patch of shrubbery behind the boathouse. "Pete?" he called in a low voice a moment later.

"Yeab. Here I am." Another man, short and heavy-set, arose from behind a fir tree to meet his companion. "Did you see 'em?"

"No! They're not there! We must've scared them away with that hose-cutting idea of Kuntz."1

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"Not there? Are you sure, Ed? Didn't yon see any of 'em?"

"I tell you, Simon, they didn't go on the barge. What do you suppose I got eyes for?"

"Well, even if you didn't see 'em maybe they're there. Might be hidin' on the barge. Why didn't yuu get on the thing and have a look?"

"I couldn't. There was a cop standin' right on the pier. He took a good squint at everybody that got on."

"So the Hardy brats didn't get on, eh?"

"Naw! Nobody but some divers and sailors and dock-hands. Oh, and a funny-lookin' fellow, a professor or somethin'. Doin' some research, one of

the sailors said. He had a colored fellow taggin' along with him, probably his handyman or somethin'."

Simon made a grimace. "I can't figure out where those Hardys disappeared to!"

"Never mind, we'll find 'em!" Bock's thin lips were twisted into a sly smile.

Together the ruffians disappeared over a hill in the direction of town, while at the same time Joe lay on the barge deck, doubled up with laughter.

"Fooled them completely!" he cried. ' * Even Chet fooled them!"

The fat boy raised his officer's nightstick in playful protest. "What do you mean, even / fooled them!" he drawled. "Why, I did the best job of all! Bock thought I was the realest

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cop he ever saw!" He removed a trim policeman's cap and mopped his brow.

"And look at Frank!" The younger Hardy lad was still convulsed. "Professor Ima Dodo himself!"

Frank surveyed his disguise. "Thanks to the Bailey Vaudeville Players, I think I'm a pretty good-looking scholar," he observed with a grin. "Horn-rimmed glasses, wig, cutaway coat-everything!"

"Well," said Joe at length, "now that we've made our escape, for the time being I'm going to scrape off the paint. I think I've been a colored boy long enough!"

"And these whiskers are getting into my mouth," observed Chet, spitting out a clump of bristles.

"But just for luck," admonished Frank, "we'd better plan to put our costumes on again when we get back to the dock. Those fellows probably will be hanging around and there's no telling what they'll try next, once they spot as."

"Yes, let's get the *Carona* up before we invite any more trouble," suggested Perry. He had been a highly amused spectator at the pier when Bock had attempted to gain entrance to the barge.

After six days of hard work in which the chums participated actively as members of the barge crew, the sunken *Carona* was raised to the surface. During this entire period the boys

A Visit to the Asylum 95

had taken care to have their disguises well adjusted whenever they approached the pier, either to land or to embark.

Early in the week they had recognized Bock and Simon among the onlookers at the dock on several occasions. Later, however, the ruffians seemed to have given up searching for them. This was exactly what Frank had hoped for, feeling certain that the ruse would divert the attention of their enemies from attempting to prevent the raising of the *Carona*.

As for Perry, he ceased staying at the City Hotel, remaining instead on the barge day and night. Thus he avoided being seen by Bock and Simon, and the raising of the yacht was accomplished without further incident.

Mr. Eiggs, the vessel's owner, was overjoyed when he was called to the pier to see his boat once more afloat. That evening he invited the entire Crux Company, including the Hardys and Chet, to a banquet at his luxurious home, sending each guest away at the close of the evening's festivities with a handsome gift.

The following morning Frank was awakened by a knock at the door. Perry came in, his face alight.

"You fellows planning anything for the next couple of weeks?"

Joe took one look at the diver's glowing face and bounded out of bed. "What's up, Mr. Perry?"

"Thought maybe you'd like to come along on

our next job, a real dive for sunken treasure. The Crux Brothers sent me over to invite you."

"Chet! Did you hear that?" yelled the younger Hardy as the stout lad stirred slightly beneath the covers.

"What!" queried the latter, peering out unenthusiastically.

"We're going adventuring again!" Joe bubbled. "Tell us, Mr. Perry, what's up!"

The diver drew up a chair.

"Well, it's like this. There's a boat called the *Katawa* that was sunk during the World War somewhere off Reed's Point, about a hundred miles south of here. She has nearly a million dollars' worth of gold and silver bullion aboard."

"And your company has the contract!" cried Frank, his eyes shining.

The diver hesitated and pursed his lips. "No, we haven't it yet. Kuntz of course is after it too. But the Cruxes have hopes. Henry's in Washington now, and I think we'll get the job without much trouble. In any case, we're going down to Reed's Point to look over the scene."

"When do we leave!" Joe asked, already half dressed.

"Right after lunch. Meet me at Bailey's Landing."

Precisely at one o'clock the lads rolled up to the place in their car. A few moments later, with Perry as their passenger, they turned

A Visit to the Asylum 97

about and followed the company trucks to Reed's Point. Two hours after that they came to a stop beside an old abandoned yacht club, half buried in the sand dunes.

"Golly, another one of these mysterious places!" blinked Chet, suddenly rousing himself from a prolonged nap in the rear seat. "Where on earth are we this time?"

The scene was indeed desolate. Aside from the dilapidated old building and an equally rickety dock, there was little to be seen but ocean and sand stretching away in the distance.

"Somewhere-out there," Perry motioned vaguely toward the vast expanse of water, "is a fortune in gold and silver waiting for somebody to bring it up."

Frank felt cold chills run up and down his spine. Here was something that thrilled him as nothing else had ever done, something of the spirit of men who brave the unknown terrors of the deep. Perry was one of them. At the moment Frank admired the diver more than anyone else in the wide world, little realizing how well that admiration would be justified in the immediate future.

It was rapidly becoming dark, so the chums decided to get supper and lodgings at the nearest town, returning to Eeed's Point early the next morning. Perry accompanied them, and it was the lanky diver who woke the boys up at dawn the following day.

"Come on, fellows! Lots to do! The barge

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is in. Got here about an hour ago. Unfortunately, so did Kuntz."

"Kuntz?" exclaimed Joe. "What'a he doing here?"

Perry shrugged. "Oh, he'll hang around just as long as there's the slightest chance of his getting the *Katawa* contract. He has all his men with him and about ten truck loads of equipment, not to mention his barge, which is anchored not far from ours."

The chums dressed hastily, despite Chet's Violent protest that they were spoiling his Bleep.

"Don't you fellows ever relax?" he complained, fumbling for his socks.

Joe snorted. "I'm afraid our Chet needs some more lessons in how to be happy though out of bed I You should be quite used to jumping up at the crack of dawn by now, my boy!"

"That's just the trouble," grumbled the stout lad. "I'm all worn out from it!"

"By the way, Mr. Perry," Frank interrupted, "I think you've missed your calling. How did you find out all this news so early in the morning?"

"Couldn't sleep," explained the other. "Finally got up and took a taxi down to the Point."

The chums rapidly completed their dressing and filed into the hotel dining room for a hurried breakfast. While they ate, Perry discussed the day's plans.

"We should get a wire giving us the contract

A Visit to the Asylum 99

some time today," he said. "Then we can go to work. In the meantime, we've some new diving suits to try out. The Cruxes brought them on the barge. All ready?"

Twenty minutes later the chums were at Reed's Point. This time the old clubhouse, instead of being deserted, was swarming with laborers, sailors and divers. Here and there along the wharf a cluster of workers surrounded a piece of machinery. The air was filled with bantering calls and cries, mingled with the hoarse shouts of foremen giving orders.

About two hundred yards from the end of the pier lay the Crux Brothers' barge at anchor. Between her and the dock Kuntz's boat, was moored. Its owner could be seen lounging on the after-deck.

"You can help carry some of this equipment from the trucks to the pier, fellows," Perry suggested. "I'll go out to the barge and see what orders there are from John Crux. Back in thirty minutes or less."

The chums went to work with a will. It was difficult but interesting. A friendly foreman explained the nature and uses of each piece of apparatus the boys trundled from the trucks to the dock.

"I don't mind the education, but it's the exercise that gets me!" Chet panted as he lay down the piston of an air pump.

"It won't hurt you!" laughed Joe. "Why,

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look at those youngsters there, working as hard as we are!"

Two boys, each about eight years old, had appeared from nowhere and were busily engaged in trying to help the workmen at the pier.

"Wonder where they came from?" Frank mused.

The words had hardly left his mouth when a scream rang out, followed by a loud splash, as one of the children toppled off the dock into the pounding surf.

In a twinkling Frank poised himself at the edge of the pier, waiting for the barest glimpse of a tuft of biown hair. There it was, almost entirely submerged in lathery foam-no, now it was gone I In an instant it had reappeared on the crest of a giant wave. Frank plunged.

"Keep away from the dock!" he heard a voice cry as his outstretched hand caught something soft.

A shadow loomed up. "What was it-the dock? He must keep away! One smashing wave catching him near the old wharf would crush him and his burden to a pulp against the piling.

But the shadow would not recede. "With every stroke away from it Frank seemed to be driven toward it, relentlessly, inevitably.

Suddenly there was blackness.

CHAPTER XIX

KTTNTZ IS STABTLED

To his surprise, Frank did not lose consciousness even though everything went black before him. Then he realized with a shock that he had been swept under the dock.

Before he could collect his senses another heavy swell surged between the pilings in a cascade of brine that carried him and his burden out again. An instant later his foot touched the sand.

"Great Scott, that was a rescue!" exclaimed Joe, rushing toward his brother. "Frank, that was noble!"

"We'd better take the little tot home," Chet suggested, taking the boy from Frank. "He's soaked through and scared stiff!"

"And I can say the same for myself!" Frank laughed.

A few moments' questioning of the lad and his companion disclosed the fact that they were brothers visiting their grandfather in the village. Neither boy, however, could remember where the relative lived. His name, they stated, was George Boy.

"We'll find out," said Joe. 101

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Mr. George Roy, a distinguished looking man with white hair and a ruddy face, was overjoyed when the chums knocked at the front door of his cottage.

"Thank you a thousand times!" he boomed when he saw his grandsons. "The youngsters ran off long before breakfast this morning and I was very much worried."

He invited the Hardys and Chet inside so that Frank might dry his clothes.

"Yes," said the genial man when the subject of the *Katawa* was brought up, "I remember that ship well! In fact, Holt Egner, her captain, was a good friend of mine. Poor chap was drowned in the wreck."

"Is it really true that there are nearly a million dollars aboard?" Joe inquired excitedly.

"There's been a rumor for about twenty-two years, ever since the *Katawa* sank, that the officers stole her money and valuables before she went down," Eoy declared. "Lined a lifeboat with it, the story goes, and got away."

The chums stared at one another, then at the speaker. Here, indeed, was a new angle to the situation-but not a very encouraging one. Suppose the *Katawa* were really empty!

"This rumor," went on Mr. Roy, "was started by one of the officers on the ship, a fellow named Clark Hornblow. Second mate, I think he was. He lost his mind shortly after the rescue."

"He did!" Joe gulped.

Kuntz Is Startled 103

"Well, sometimes lie's all right and at other times he raves about the gold that was stolen from the ship by his fellow officers. He's been *In* an asylum for some years."

"Where is the institution?" Frank queried, suddenly struck with an idea.

"A place called Overlook Sanatorium," Roy replied. "It's just outside of town. You must have passed it on your way in."

"I remember. Doesn't it sit back about a quarter of a mile from the road on a hill?" Joe asked.

His host nodded and abruptly changed the subject to that of his grandsons' rescue that morning.

"I don't know how to express my gratitude to you, young man," he said to Frank as the chums prepared to leave. "Some day, maybe--"

The Hardy boy smiled and waved his hand modestly. Back at the car he turned to his companions.

"Fellows, we must-----"

"Interview that officer!" Joe finished impolitely.

The chums stopped at their room so that Frank might put on fresh clothes. Shortly afterward the boys rolled up into the long drive to the asylum and stopped at the massive iron gate leading to the grounds. A watchman surveyed them suspiciously.

"What do you want?" he growled.

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"We should like to see Mr. Hornblow, if possible," Frank announced.

Keluctantly the guard opened the gate. "Go up those steps and ask at the office," he snapped.

Chet looked at the heavily-barred windows and hung back.

"I draw the line here," he shuddered. "You fellows can go in there, but not I! Never!"

Frank forced a laugh. "Well, we'll be back in a minute."

"We hope!" Joe grinned. "Personally, now that we're here, I'm not so enthusiastic about it either."

The brothers tiptoed up the steps and pulled open the heavy door. There a second gate confronted them.

"Friends to see Mr. Hornblow," Frank announced to the attendant. There was a rattle of chains and a clang of heavy bolts. The Hardys found themselves inside.

A white-coated attendant scurried down the corridor, returning a moment later with a heavy-set man in a faded naval uniform. His beady eyes darted hither and yon incessantly. His tousled gray hair added to the general wildness of his appearance.

"Come in here," the attendant advised the boys, indicating a sitting-room adjacent to the door. "Captain Hornblow always does his interviewing in here. I'll be back shortly," he said, and went out.

Kuntz Is Startled 105

For an instant the chums were frozen to the spot. Alone with a madman! They certainly had not expected this. Suddenly the old captain spoke.

"I'm Hornblow of the *Katawa*. Who are you, young men!"

Frank summoned his voice. "I'm Frank Hardy. This is my brother Joe. We heard about you, and-----"

The officer held up his hand. "Now, now, that's enough! You heard about me, and what you heard is all wrong. Let me put you straight!"

It was obvious that silence was expected of the two visitors.

"Of course," the man continued, "I wasn't in the safe all the time. Do you think sot" He glared at Joe, who coughed a trifle nervously.

After an interval of several seconds Horn-blow turned to Frank and scanned the boy's face intently.

"Let me tell you something," he said at length. "The *Katawaf* Did the foreigners sink her? No!" He thundered the word and crashed his fist on the table.

"No!" he continued. "Shelley and Hark-ness and Boles, they sank her! But-----!"

He hesitated, and slowly swung his gaze from one to the other of the boys, his eyes standing out as if they would pop from his head.

"But!" he roared again, "not before they

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lined the boat with gold and silver and jewels! Do you hear?"

"Lined the lifeboat?" Frank ventured, becoming adjusted to the manner of their strange host.

"Ah, you're intelligent, my boy! Intelligent! The lifeboat, of course! They put the money and the jewels under the seats in the lifeboat. Who would ever look there? They built the seats around the money I The seats were the money, the money was the seats- understand!" His voice rose to a wail, and the attendant hurried back into the room.

"Captain Hornblow! Please be quiet!"

The officer immediately calmed himself. Then he laughed bitterly. "Listen to him call me Captain! I'm a second mate, not a captain. He thinks I will find the lifeboat and give him some money if he calls me Captain. Well, I *will* find the lifeboat, wait and see! I'll find it!" He was growing agitated again and the attendant turned to the boys.

"You'll have to leave now," he said.

Hornblow raised his hand. "Yes, boys, you must go," he said quietly. Then his voice rose. "But not before I tell you the secret! Death! That's the secret! Death to the man who dives for the *Katawa*! No man shall touch her, and live through it. There-that is my secret. If you tell it, you too shall die!"

Muttering threats and warnings he was led away.

Kuntz Is Startled 107

The brothers rejoined Chet at the car. The stout boy was only too glad to get away from the vicinity of the asylum, and sighed with relief as they drove back toward the dock.

"Frank, don't you think we ought to tell Perry about those rumors I The Cruxes should know, too," Joe remarked as they rolled down the highway.

His brother nodded. "You're right. They may be able to check up further and find that it would be useless to dive for the *Katawa* because it's empty."

Back at the dock the boys were suddenly aware of a great decrease in the activity of the early morning.

"Where are the trucks?" Joe stopped short in astonishment.

There was no sign of the Crux Company. The apparatus on the dock had disappeared and the trucks were gone. Among the workmen still lounging

around the pier there was not one familiar face.

"Kuntz's outfit has taken charge!" Frank said abruptly. "Look, there are his trucks, over there beyond that fence!"

Joe whistled in surprise. "By George, you're right! Do you suppose-" He looked at his brother, struck by a sudden thought.

"Kuntz has won the bid!" returned Frank. "Wait, I'll ask that workman over there."

Leaving the others, Frank went down to the dock and accosted a laborer.

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"Oh, they left an hour ago," replied the man. "Kuntz has the job. Maybe you'll find some of your men at the hotel."

Disappointed, Frank went back to his companions.

"Personally, I think it's all just as well," Chet drawled. "We've had enough deep-sea diving anyway."

"Let's go to the hotel right away," suggested Frank. "Maybe Mr. Perry's waiting for us."

A quarter of an hour later the chums knocked on the diver's door after the clerk had informed them that the man was still registered.

"Come in!" Frank pushed open the door. "Oh, hello! I was hoping you boys would be back soon."

The diver was making a visible effort to sound cheerful.

"We've just come from the dock," Joe said.

Perry stared at the floor. "Telegram came just after you boys left this morning. We lost the bid, and Kuntz was given the job. I can't imagine how it happened."

"We're certainly sorry, Mr. Perry," Frank sympathized. "We-----"

"By the way," the diver interrupted, "where have you boys been all morning? I saw the commotion on the dock from the barge, but when John

Crux and I got there you'd left with the child. Tell me all about it."

Kuntz Is Startled 109

Frank related the high spots of the rescue, then launched into a description of their interview with the demented officer of the *Katawa*.

"Don't you think, Mr. Perry, that he might be right about that treasure? Maybe it was stolen before the ship sank."

"Impossible!" the diver scoffed. "Don't forget-you've been talking to a madman. There's no accounting for what he might say. No, all the officers except the captain reached shore after the sinking and immediately reported to the government. They were investigated as a matter of routine but nothing suspicious was ever found. They all have good jobs today-all except Hornblow. We checked up on everything before we came down here. But it doesn't matter, we've lost the job."

Disconsolately the chums bade the diver good-bye, promising to keep in touch with him, and possibly rejoin him in the future. Then they departed for their own room on the second floor.

Suddenly Frank halted in the corridor.

"Listen!" he whispered.

A loud commotion could be heard at the end of the hallway.

"Sounds as if it's in the room next to ours," Chet exclaimed softly.

The boys tip-toed quietly along the heavy carpet. As they arrived by their door it was obvious that the noise arose from the next room.

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"I'll bet it's Kuntz!" Joe Hardy whispered hoarsely.

"Quick!" Frank decided. "You two go inside our room and listen beside the wall. I'll stay here."

He flicked the lock quietly and Joe and Chet passed into the room. Pulling the door to again, he cocked an ear intently.

"It's a jinx!" a heavy voice boomed out quaveringly. "It's a jinx, I tell you. I can't go through with it!"

"Now, now, calm yourself, Kuntz," came another voice soothingly. "Probably those Hardys sent the warnings just to scare you off and let the Cruxes have the *Katawa*."

"Supposing the Hardys did send the notes I got?" the diver rasped. "What about that vision I had? I dreamed that I'd be caught in the wreck if I went down for the treasure. What about that?"

"Aw, you probably ate too much supper I" scoffed a third voice. "You ain't really so superstitious as all that, are you?"

The sound of creaking floor boards could be heard, and a heavy step passed to and fro.

"Calm yourself, Kuntz!" snapped the hard voice again. Unmistakably it belonged to Bock. "I got an idea."

The pacing ceased. "Well, what is it?" quavered the diver.

"There's an old Gypsy woman about three blocks from here who tells fortunes. She'll

Kuntz Is Startled 111

tell you whether you're worryin' for somethin' or nothin'."

Silence. Then Simon's husky voice chimed in. "That's right, Kuntz, Ed's right. You go around and ask her. She'll put you wise, and then we can go ahead without bein' scared of any thin'."

Joe came out hurriedly into the hallway.

"Frank! Did you hear about the Gypsy?" he queried softly. "Suppose I run around there and tip her off as to what to say?"

An hour later a powerful looking man with iron gray hair pounded at the door of a rude shack on the outskirts of the village.

"Come in!" issued a shrill cackle from inside.

Kuntz pushed open the door and found himself in a stuffy room filled with queer articles of furniture piled here and there without regard for arrangement. The place smelled strongly of incense.

"This way," chirped a large, swarthy woman in a brilliantly-colored Gypsy costume. She waddled along in front of the diver into the next room, which was bare except for two chairs and a table.

"Sit here, Mr. Kuntz," she invited.

The diver stared in astonishment. "Why- uh-how did you know my name?" he stuttered, gazing uneasily at the woman.

"I know the past, and I read the future!"

The shrill voice had changed to a mysterious

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monotone. It went on to tell the man many of his traits of character. Then the woman said:

"Now, Mr. Kuntz, you propose to dive for treasure on a sunken ship, do you not?"

The big man was plainly flustered. He had been to fortune-tellers before, but never had one shown so complete a knowledge of his thoughts and intentions, even knowing his name!

"I-I-yes!" he gasped, staring at her as if hypnotized.

She held forth her hands and took hold of his gnarled palms.

"You must leave at once," she chanted. "You must leave at once or you shall die!"

"You-you mean I-?" The diver was perspiring.

The fortune-teller stared at him grimly and nodded, "You must leave the sunken *Katawa* unmolested, or you shall die a horrible death!"

Kuntz arose, white and shaking. He fished blankly in his pocket for a roll of bills, handed one to the woman, and staggered out into the open. It was already dusk.

The diver walked rapidly in the direction of the village center. As he passed a clump of shrubbery on a lonely stretch of road, a shrill cry froze him in his tracks.

"You will die on the *Katawa!*"

The diver jumped like a startled deer. An instant later he crashed to the ground and lay motionless.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MYSTEBIOUS PBOWLEB "JOE!"

The younger Hardy lad had just burst into his room at the hotel, where Frank and Chet were silently awaiting his return. The former jumped up to greet his brother.

"What happened?"

Joe sank into a chair, doubled up with laughter.

"Frank, it worked! It was almost too perfect to be true!"

"Might let a fellow in on some of your mysteries once in a while," Chet grumbled. "What have you been up to anyway? Frank wouldn't tell me."

"I didn't know myself," Frank retorted. "At least, not exactly. Come on, Joe. What happened?"

"Well, I dashed around to the Gypsy's cottage-the clerk at the hotel desk told me where she was. I informed her a man named Kuntz was coming and that he'd better not tackle the job of diving for treasure on the *Katawa*. Then I hid in another room and listened.

"I guess she does have some psychic power,

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for she told him a lot of things I hadn't mentioned. When she came to the part about his diving, she certainly made it plain! He was so scared he couldn't get out of there fast enough!"

"Where is he now?"

"Don't know. By the time I came out of hiding and left the shack he had disappeared, and I'll bet he stays disappeared!"

"Good work!" approved Frank. "I just called Perry and he's coming down in a few

minutes. Had to do some errands first. j_____»»»

He was interrupted by muffled footsteps and the sound of voices approaching.

"Listen! Must be Bock and Simon coming back! They left, Joe, right after you did. Don't know where they went."

The footsteps came nearer and paused before the door of the next room. There was an audible click as the key was turned in the lock, and an instant later the door slammed.

"That's a fine howdy-you-do!" snorted Bock. "Now everything's spoiled!"

The walls of the old hotel were conveniently thin, so the chums could hear nearly every word that was spoken.

"Can't figure it all out," they heard Simon remark. "Just exactly what did the clerk tell you!"

"I told you six times!" Bock said irritably. "He says he got a message from the hospital

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that a fellow named Kuntz, according to the card in his pocket, was picked up unconscious on Mulberry Street about twenty minutes ago. The call just came in while I was in the lobby waitin' for you to come back from the dock."

"What'd they say was wrong with him?"

"They said he'd stumbled and hit his head, and was havin' a nervous breakdown or some-thin'."

"Nervous breakdown!" sneered the other. "What're you talkin' about?"

"Well, that's what the doc said over the phone to the hotel clerk," snapped Bock peevishly. "Come on, let's go over to the hospital and find out."

The door opened and slammed shut. The sound of footsteps died away at the end of the corridor. Instantly Frank arose and picked up the phone.

"Give me the hospital," he said to the operator. "Hello I'd like to get information on the condition of Mr. Kuntz, please."

There was a moment's silence, then a prolonged crackle in the receiver. Frank's face slowly broke into a grin. When the rattling sound ceased, he hung up and turned to the others.

"Joe," he smiled slyly. "I think you did a better job than you thought you did. The doctor says Kuntz must have stumbled on the sidewalk and hit his head. Says he has a slight concussion of the brain, but that it's not seri-

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ous. What Kuntz is suffering from is a bad case of nervousness. He must have had a severe shock from something besides the blow on his head."

Joe whistled. "Golly. I really didn't mean to make an invalid out of the fellow."

"He deserves it, whether you intended it or not." Frank replied. "Listen. I'm going over to the hospital and get the details. Wait here. I'll be back in twenty minutes."

Before the others could protest at being left behind, Frank had disappeared. A few moments later there came a knock at the door and Perry walked in.

"Hello, fellows! Why, where's Frank?"

Joe related the events of the past hour, and the genial diver's enthusiasm grew by leaps and bounds.

"Serves the rascal right!" he exclaimed when the younger Hardy lad had finished. "Do you know that there's more than half a chance we'll get the *Katawa* job back again under the circumstances? I think I'll call John Crux. He's downstairs in the lobby waiting for me to pack."

"Just a minute. I think Frank's coming back," Joe interrupted as footsteps rapidly approached their door. An instant later the lad burst in.

"Hello, Mr. Perry! Say, I've some good news! Just talked to Kuntz's doctor at the hospital, and by the way, I had a hard time

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keeping out of sight of Bock and Simon, who were hanging around!"

"What did he say?" Joe inquired eagerly.

"Kuntz is in no shape to do any more diving for a long while. Bad nerves. The doctor told me also that after arguing with Kuntz for half an hour or more he got the fellow finally to send a messenger to the dock to tell his men to pack up."

Perry rose and grabbed the phone. "Page Mr. Crux!" he rapped. The chums waited with bated breaths, as Perry drummed on the table impatiently. Suddenly he spoke. "Mr. Crux? Hello. John? Say, I've some news! Be right down!" He hung up and turned to the others. "Be back directly. Want to tell John everything."

In a few moments he burst into their room.

"Boys, I think all our troubles are going to be righted!" he exclaimed. "John Crux just wired the details to his brother in Washington, and we ought to have an answer first thing in the morning."

The chums could scarcely contain themselves until dawn the next day. Perry joined them at six o'clock breakfast.

"John Crux is going to wait for the wire," the diver said merrily. "He wants us to go to the dock right away and assemble the equipment again. The trucks are already there, and so is the barge."

The friends piled into their car and drove

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rapidly to the pier, which was already a beehive of activity. To their surprise Kuntz was there, impatiently ordering his men about. He gave no sign that he noticed either Perry or the Hardys.

"Come on! Move!" thundered Kuntz, raising his arm menacingly.

One of the workmen deliberately dropped a coil of air-hose. It slithered from the dock into the water below.

"What's the idea!" bellowed the enraged diver. "*Get that hose!*"

The workman made no move to obey. Others crowded around, all scowling blackly at Kuntz.

"Listen, Mr. Kuntz, we're not movin' another inch until we find out why we're losin' our jobs," muttered one of the laborers. "You tell us to get busy on this, and then you tell us we're quittin'. Now, what's *your* idea!"

"Yes," agreed another. "What's *your* idea?"

A ripple of subdued snarls passed through the crowd. Kuntz glanced around nervously.

"Listen, men," he said quaveringly. "We can't go ahead with the job. It's-it's too dangerous. Somebody's likely to get hurt, or killed. I_uh-I-----"

A cry of derision went up.

"He's scared! And him a diver! Bah!" sneered one.

"And just because he's scared, we lose our jobs!" shouted another angrily.

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A roar of threats and sneers swept through the gang. Kuntz's face was livid with mingled fright and rage. One of the workmen, slightly older than the others, advanced toward the diver.

"What about the money we're supposed to get, Mr. Kuntz?" he queried with an ugly frown.

The big man hesitated before replying, his face contorted with anger. "All right, you can have your money!" he spluttered. "I'll pay you your wages, but pack up that stuff and get out of here!"

He stalked off the dock toward the yacht club, leaving the men to grumble among themselves.

In the meantime the Hardys and Chet were busy unloading equipment from the trucks and assembling the heavy diving apparatus. At noon they noticed John Crux drive up and hurry into the clubhouse. A moment later Perry ran out and signalled to the chums.

"We got it!" he shouted. "Just received a wire from Washington. The government has given us the contract!"

"I owe you boys a great many thanks," smiled John Crux just behind the diver. "It seems too that our friends here-" he indicated the chums-"have everything just about ready!"

"We certainly have!" responded Joe.

"Well, we'll see that you lads get some div

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ing this time," said the older man. "In the meantime, don't work too hard. Be sure to get plenty of rest. You'll need it, to be good undersea workers."

The three lads returned to town in high spirits.

"To bed early, and up at the crack of dawn!" Frank ordered as they drew up to the hotel.

"Eight!" agreed his brother. "We'll be divers yet!"

"That lets me out!" said Chet firmly. "I'll still be an onlooker, thank you!"

As the boys passed through the lobby after supper on their way out for a brief walk before turning in, the clerk summoned Frank. The older Hardy lad rejoined the others a moment later, frowning at a paper he held in his hand.

"What's the matter?" Joe asked, alarmed at his brother's countenance.

"Look!" Frank held out the sheet for the others to read.

"'Leave town at once,' " Joe murmured. "'Kuntz blames you boys for everything and has sworn to put you out of the way. Signed, Perry.' Great Scott!"

"There's no joking this time!" Chet exclaimed, looking around apprehensively. "I think we 'd better get moving!"

Frank took another look at the paper, then crumpled it up. "Rats!" he snorted. "Kuntz isn't going to scare us that easily."

"You can stay if you want to, but I'm leav-

The Mysterious Prowler 12]

ing!" Chet announced flatly. "Personally, I think this is no place for us."

"What a detective!" Joe scoffed, playfully poking his stout chum. "Why, secret warnings are what detectives thrive on!"

"You'd better stay with us, Chet. The meals are pretty good in this hotel!" Frank laughed.

"Well, all right," agreed the fat boy reluctantly. "But I think no good will come of it."

The chums soon forgot the note in thinking of the following morning's activities. After a short walk around town they returned to the hotel and prepared for bed.

"Did you leave a call for five?" Joe inquired as he snuggled between the sheets.

"Certainly did!" Frank replied, turning off the light. "Do you suppose we'll be able to get Chet up at that hour?" A muffled groan of dismay in the fat lad's direction was his only answer.

It seemed to Frank that he had been asleep only five minutes when he awoke with a start. The room was pitch-black. He could hear nothing but the regular breathing of his chums. Then suddenly a board creaked.

He held his breath and lay rigid, straining his eyes to look around the room. Suddenly he saw a vague shape moving stealthily toward his bed.

CHAPTER XV

ANOTHER SECRET WARNING

For an instant Frank was undecided as to what to do. Should he remain still and find out what the intruder was up to, or should he give a sudden alarm?

As possible plans for quick action raced through his mind, he caught the glint of something metallic about midway up in the blotchy outline. A weapon to injure him? He thought of Perry's warning. With a sudden spring he flung himself out of bed.

"Joe! Chet!" he called.

There was a muffled rush of footsteps and a dull clang outside the window.

"What's the matter?" Joe cried, instantly awake.

He dived for the wall-switch. As the light went on Frank sprang to the window, his brother at his heels.

"There it goes!" the older Hardy exclaimed, pointing toward a dim figure that had just leaped from the fire-escape and was running down the street. An instant later the fugitive had ducked into an alley and was gone.

"Well, I '11 be- I" Joe stared at his brother.

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"What happened?" yelled Chet, who had only just roused himself.

"Boy, that was a close call I" Frank whistled. "I woke up a few minutes ago and saw somebody creeping toward my bed. Whoever it was must have planned to hurt me-I could see something shining in his hand in the moonlight. I jumped up and called you two, and the fellow dashed out the window and down the fire-escape. "

"Golly!" Chet exclaimed breathlessly. "Say, this is the last straw. I'm not staying here any longer!"

"Perry's warning must have come with good reason," Joe observed. "No doubt our visitor was Kuntz, or-----"

"Or Bock or Simon," finished Frank. "Yes, it looks as if they mean business this time."

"Well, I'm packing up right this minute!" Chet shivered. "I've had enough!"

Joe suddenly exploded. "If Kuntz and his gang are going to scare us away as easily as all this, then I 'm for the three of us going home on kiddie-cars."

"And I'm with you," agreed his older brother, "except that we're not going home. We must get the better of Kuntz and his cronies and land them behind the bars where they belong!"

"Eight! How about it, Chet? Are you still with us?"

The thought of leaving his chums and going

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home alone was more intolerable to the stout lad than was facing the danger at hand.

"Well, all right, I give in again," he said reluctantly. " But I still think we 're all crazy!"

"We're in a tight place," Frank admitted. "Kuntz and Bock and Simon are dangerous characters, there's no doubt about it. But with us out of the way it will be easier for them to carry through plans to wreck the Crux Brothers' work and perhaps make good their threat to cut Perry's lifeline. What about that?"

"We have a big job ahead of us," Joe agreed, "and if we don't do it successfully we probably won't live to tell the tale."

It was some time before the chums were able to get to sleep. Chet suggested that one of them remain on guard throughout the rest of the night but Frank vetoed the idea.

"Whoever came in wouldn't be foolish enough to try it again the same night," he decided, and at length the boys slumbered off.

The next thing they knew the sun was streaming in through the window.

"Golly, we've overslept!" Joe exclaimed.

"Yes, it's six o'clock already," Chet muttered ironically.

The boys reached the dock before seven. Perry, looking haggard, met them.

"Didn't you get my note?"

"Certainly did!" Frank laughed. "But here we are, just the same!"

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The diver looked dismayed. "I was afraid you wouldn't take my warning seriously," he said, frowning, "but really I wasn't joking. Kuntz is as raving mad as a maniac, and he's out for blood. There's no telling what he'll do when he catches up with you-and me!"

"Unless we catch up with him first!" Frank amended. "No, Mr. Perry, we're sticking by you. That's final!"

The diver gazed earnestly at their determined faces. Then he smiled. "All right, fellows, it's a go! Now, let's get down to work."

In a jiffy the four were in the barge tender, headed out toward the anchored vessel. During the brief ride Frank mentioned the incident of the intruder to Perry, who again attempted to persuade the boys to leave town before harm should befall them. The chums, however, remained firm in their decision to fight Kuntz to the end.

The incident was soon forgotten in the excitement of boarding the barge and watching the commencement of diving operations. Perry announced that he would be the first to go down.

"I want to test out one of these newfangled suits," he explained. "We haven't had a real chance to try them yet, but if they're as good as the Cruxes seem to think, our work will be a lot easier."

The "newfangled" suits to which Perry referred were a recent addition to the Crux Brothers' equipment, differing radically from

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the conventional diving outfit ordinarily used.

"Why, there's nothing to it!" Joe exclaimed skeptically. "Can you really go down very far in that?"

"I'll be at three hundred feet in a few minutes," laughed Perry. "That's where the *Katawa* lies."

In a twinkling he had donned a pair of wool-lined coveralls. Then he drew on a slim rubber suit to which were attached four small steel cylinders resembling elongated thermos bottles. At his signal a workman stepped up and quickly screwed a light helmet onto the rolled collar of the suit. Suddenly, to the boys' astonishment, the lanky diver disappeared overboard.

"Where's his air-hoist?" Joe exclaimed in bewilderment, while Frank stood aghast and Chet blinked wonderingly.

A workman laughed. "Don't need any with that outfit!" he grinned proudly. "Ain't many diving companies with one o' them!"

"Didn't you see those cylinders on his back?" another workman ventured. "He keeps his air in those. It's oxygen and helium. Turns on a valve to breathe."

"But how on earth does he come up again!" Joe still could hardly believe his eyes.

The second workman shrugged. "Easy enough! Turns another valve to inflate the rubber suit, then starts back up again. Oh, I tell you-you can't beat these new outfits! Did you see him get into it? Took fifty-five seconds

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for the whole procedure! Takes a good half hour with the old suits!"

Despite the assurances of the barge crew, the boys were uneasy until a sudden cry rang out.

"Diver off the port bow!" There was a rush of feet as the men dashed forward. Joe could see a glittering object bobbing in the water a hundred yards away.

"Lower a boat," ordered the barge captain.

Ten minutes later Perry was back on deck, smiling happily. "All right, fellows," he beamed. "Which one of you wants to go next?"

The Hardy brothers tossed a coin and Joe won. Grinning, he drew on the suit, while Perry explained the technique of maneuvering below the surface.

"If you feel smothery, turn your oxygen Valve a little more," he said. "This other valve here on your chest-piece is to inflate your suit. We'll blow it up a little for your trip down so you won't drop too fast. When you want to come up, open it all the way." He continued his instructions further, made Joe repeat them for safety's sake, and a moment later the younger Hardy had disappeared over the side.

His pulse beat high as the waters closed over his head. As he sank, he forgot gradually his uneasiness in the wonders of this mysterious world of liquid. The water changed from green to brown, then to pitch black. Still he sank.

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Where was the wreck? It seemed as if he must have reached the very core of the earth.

Then he remembered his searchlight and Bwitched it on. The beam cut a long, comforting swath through the blackened waters.

A sudden voice startled him. "GollyI" ha exclaimed to himself. " I 'd forgotten my radiophone!"

"Have you reached bottom yet?" He recognized the low tones as those of Perry.

The roar of his own voice inside the helmet startled him even more. "Not yet!" he heard himself answering.

"Light on?"

"Yes."

"See the *Katawa* yet?"

"No. I-wait! There it is! I'm just coining down by it now!"

The liner lay partly on its side, like a great ghost in the darkness of another world. Joe felt himself trembling with excitement.

He came to rest in a mass of tangled weeds* by the ghost-ship's keel, and stood fascinated at the myriads of colored fish of all sizes and shapes swimming slowly across the beam of his searchlight.

"How do you like it?" came Perry's reassuring voice again.

"Wonderful!" Joe returned. "But I can't see much of the ship. It's too big. Golly, what a whopper!"

"Better come up now," Perry suggested.

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Joe's hand trembled a bit as he reached for the inflation valve. What if it didn't work?

He gave it a twist, and with a sigh of relief felt the air rush into his suit. He had a sensation of growing lightness, and a moment later found himself slowly drifting upward.

"Did you fasten your line?" queried Perry.

The line! He had forgotten it in the excitement of this strange journey. He twisted the outlet valve and sank to the bottom again. Then, as Perry had instructed him, he tied the roll of cable at his belt to a jutting piece of the wreck. Next he inflated the suit once more and paid out the thin wire as he rose.

"When you feel the first knot, etop for ten minutes," Perry ordered.

A moment later Joe noticed a knot in the wire as it passed slowly out through his gloved hands. Tightening his fist on the cable, he held himself at a standstill for ten minutes by the clock in his helmet.

Up on the barge Frank was listening to Perry's explanation of the knotted cable.

"If a diver comes up too fast, he gets what we call the bends," Perry was saying. "That's a serious illness resulting from too rapid a passage from the tremendous pressure on the ocean bottom to the lighter air pressure on the surface."

"I see," the older Hardy lad interjected. "The diver ties a cable to something on the bottom and holds on to it as he comes up-

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When he reaches a certain level he stops and adjusts himself to the lighter pressure."

"Eight," said Perry. "Knots are tied at certain intervals in the cable before the diver goes down. When he feels one of them he knows it's time for him to stop a few minutes. Joe will have to do that three times."

"What is the pressure down there by the *Katawa*?" Chet inquired.

"At three hundred feet the pressure on a diver is a hundred and fifty tons. On the surface it is only fifteen pounds, so you can see what a difference Joe has to get used to on his way up."

"A hundred and fifty tons! Whew!" Chet made up his mind once again not to be a diver.

Frank laughed. "The pressure wouldn't be as hard on you as it would be on a slim fellow like me!"

"Just the same," the stout lad retorted, "you can have all the diving you want! But not for me!"

Some time later Joe was hauled into the tender and escorted by his excited companions back to the barge deck. The younger Hardy lad was wildly enthusiastic.

"Wait till you try it, Frank!" he bubbled. "It'll be the most thrilling experience you'll ever have had. I think I'd rather be a diver than a detective-almost!"

While Joe was being clapped on the back by the barge crew for his sportsmanship in at-

Another Secret Warning 131

tempting a dive so deep on his first trip, two young men in slouchy clothes were muttering together back on the dock.

"Do you suppose we're too late, Ed?" one was saying in a hoarse, unpleasant voice.

The other leered. "Naw! They'll be divin' all week-not just today. We'll get on that barge somehow and fix those valves so they won't work right."

Simon smiled wickedly. "Good idea. Come along to the clubhouse and we'll talk it over."

Neither of them noticed a queer-looking, elumped-over figure in a black cloak following them to the dilapidated building. The ruffians took a path leading to what had been the club kitchen in an annex adjoining the main part of the house.

"Nobody'll ever see us back here!" laughed Bock. "We'll figure out a way to fix the Hardys and Perry once and for all."

"If they only knew what was comin' to 'em!" hissed his companion, seating himself beside the other on the rickety old kitchen porch.

The two muttered together for several minutes, now and then bursting forth into hilarious laughter. All the while beneath them, under the porch, the strange, black-clad figure listened intently.

In the meantime, a sudden squall blowing up from the southeast forced a halt in diving operations for the day.

"I'm afraid we'll have to wait until tomor-

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row for your adventure, Frank," Perry decided as the wind grew stronger. "I'll be waiting for you first thing in the morning. But be careful, fellows. Don't forget that Kuntz is around!"

The diver previously had urged the boys to spend their nights at the clubhouse with him and his crew, but Frank had refused politely. Both he and Joe felt that such a plan might give Kuntz, Bock and Simon added opportunity to slip something over on them.

"We'll know more about what they're up to if we stay at the hotel," the older Hardy lad declared.

"Yes, that's just what I'm afraid of," Chet complained as they drove back to town that evening. "I don't see any sense in deliberately getting in Kuntz's way."

It was dusk when the boys arrived at the hotel.

"I can hardly wait until you've made a descent !" Joe exclaimed to his brother at supper. "You'll see all sorts of strange fish and seaweed and things. But that sunken ship-what a monster! Looks like a tremendous dead whale, only it's about twenty times as big I"

As the brothers went upstairs to retire early, Chet excused himself, saying he was not tired and would read a newspaper in the lobby for a while. The Hardys undressed rapidly and jumped into bed.

Joe yawned

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"Goodnight."

" 'Night, Joe."

Frank snapped off the light and though his brother dropped off to sleep at once, he lay awake a long while thinking over possible ways and means of trapping Kuntz and his scoundrelly friends. Suddenly, with a chill of alarm, he saw a shadow outlined against the window. Could it belong to the same person that had appeared the night before!

This time Frank steeled himself. He would wait until the prowler, whoever he might be, actually had reached his bed. Then he would spring up and tackle the fellow.

The figure stealthily climbed into the room. This time, however, it moved toward Joe's bed near the door. The sleeping lad breathed peacefully, unaware of the menace hovering near him.

Suddenly the intruder stopped, and Frank thought he heard the faint crackle of paper. A second later the shadow glided noiselessly to-ward the hall door. The knob ground faintly and the latch clicked open.

At the same instant Frank threw himself from the covers and dived at the strange looking ghost. He fell short and landed with a thug on the carpet. As the figure vanished into the hall, a hideous scream rang out in the dimly-lighted corridor!

CHAPTER XVI

THE FOOLHARDY CAMERAMAN

chet stood in the hotel lobby, whistling softly. His chums had gone to their room following his excuse that he wanted to read the newspaper before turning in. However, the stout lad had another intention. He realized that the Hardys thought that he lacked courage; that he was afraid of Kuntz and the latter 'a confederates, Bock and Simon.

"I guess Frank and Joe can't help but feel that way about me after all I've said concerning going home," he admitted to himself. "But I'll show them! I'll show them that I'm just as brave as they are!"

He sat down and watched the great clock over the hotel desk tick away the minutes. At length he arose. "They ought to be asleep by now," he decided, "and probably have forgotten all about that prowler who came in last night. Well, *I* haven't forgotten. He'll probably come back tonight, and *I'll catch him!*"

It was nearly eleven o'clock when he tiptoed up the stairway. He paused to catch his breath on the third floor, then quietly crept along the dimly-lighted corridor to their room

1.34

The Foolhardy Cameraman 135

He stopped at the door and listened, but could hear nothing save the faint sounds of breathing. Then he heard a floor-board creak inside the room!

There followed a moment of silence, after which came a loud clash and a dull thud on the other side of the door. A second later a shrouded figure burst from the room.

For an instant the form was only a few inches from Chet, then it was gone. With a scream of anger and disappointment the stout boy realized that he was too late. He had lost his courage, and with it his chance to reach out and grab the fugitive.

At that moment another figure burst from the room and crashed into him. "Chet!" shouted Frank, back on his feet in a twinkling. "Did you see-which way did he go?"

Without waiting for an answer, the older Hardy lad dashed toward an open window at the end of the corridor. Joe ran behind him.

"Gone again!" muttered the latter. "These fire-escapes are certainly convenient for him, whoever he is."

Frank turned disappointedly from the window. "No use trying to catch him now. Chet! What on earth-----"

The fat boy was picking himself up from the floor. "I'm-I'm sorry," he moaned. "I was standing guard out here and-well, I guess I must have been too scared to catch the fellow."

"Never mind, Chet, don't worry about it,"*

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Frank soothed his chum, who was on the verge of tears over his failure. "We'll find out who he is before long."

"Yes, and we'll catch him next time," Joe said tersely. "This has gone far enough."

His brother, who had entered their room ahead of the others, suddenly uttered an exclamation.

"Look, here's a note!" He held out a torn scrap of cheap tablet paper. On it, in an almost illegible scrawl, were the words, "FRANK HARDY'S DOOM IS NEAR." There was no signature attached.

For a moment the boys were silent. Then Joe spoke. "Frank," he said grimly. "Whatever else we do, you're not going diving I"

"Why not?" queried his brother.

"Because-you're not. It isn't worth the risk. Kuntz and his gang will go to any length to make sure you never come up again. I know it!"

The older Hardy boy laughed. "Shucka, Joe, how can they do anything like that? Why, Perry's men are guarding the diving apparatus day and night. Nobody who isn't known to them can get within a mile of it. How could Kuntz or any of his gang damage anything now?"

The lad refused to take his brother's well-meant warning seriously, so Joe finally gave in. The following morning the chums returned to the dock, Frank assuring the others that

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everything would be perfectly all right if he should go ahead with his prospective dive.

"What's all the crowd doing here?" Chet wondered as he waited for Perry on the pier.

The clubhouse grounds and the waterfront were alive with buzzing villagers watching the workmen trundle heavy pieces of equipment to and fro in preparation for the day's diving. Suddenly Joe, who had been gazing at the onlookers, caught his brother's arm.

"Say, Frank, isn't that somebody we know?" He nodded toward a white-haired man.

"By Jove, he's Mr. Roy, isn't he I" replied Frank. "The grandfather of the boy we pulled out of the water."

"You mean you pulled him out," laughed Joe. "Here he comes now."

The man apparently had recognized them, for he walked over to the boys and smiled pleasantly.

"Aren't you the Hardy lads? Why, of course you are! Fine morning, isn't it?" He chatted agreeably for a few moments, then paused and gazed around at the scurrying workmen.

"Well, I see you're still determined to go after the *Katawa's* treasure!" he observed smilingly.

"We certainly are, Mr. Boy," Joe replied.

The older man shook his head. "I'm afraid you're on a wild goose chase," he remarked. "There isn't a chance in a million that you'll find anything of value."

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"You said that was only a rumor about the officers stealing the money," Frank cut in.

A portly, middle-aged man standing unobserved near the group cocked an ear intently.

"It's more than a rumor," Roy persisted. "It's the truth, I'm convinced of that. I-----"

He was interrupted by a tap on the shoulder.

"Pardon the intrusion," said the portly stranger, stepping up, "but I couldn't help overhearing your conversation. Do you mind my asking what officers stole what money?"

"Why, the *Katawa's* officers stole the *Kata-wa's* money," returned Boy a trifle impatiently. "I can prove-----"

Again the stranger interrupted. "I 'm afraid you're wrong, sir," he contradicted. "I happen to be the brother of First Officer Shelley, and I know that no such thing ever happened."

"I can prove that it did!" snapped Roy. "Clark Hornblow says-----"

The other interrupted with a scornful laugh. "Hornblow 'a insane! What proof is he!"

Boy was obviously annoyed. "Hornblow has his lucid intervals," he spluttered, "and he tells the same story then. What would he gain by making it all up?"

The argument threatened to last indefinitely with neither side scoring. The Hardys were glad when Perry stepped up and motioned to them.

"We're all ready," he announced, slipping through the crowd which had congregated

The Foolhardy Cameraman 135

around Hoy and the stranger. The chums quickly followed the diver to the edge of the wharf.

"Wait," said Frank suddenly. "I've an idea, Mr. Perry. Why not get a list of just what valuables the *Katawa* had on board and find out whether this rumor could possibly be correct?"

The diver pondered a moment. "We've already attempted to get such a list," he said at length, "but we haven't succeeded. The company that operated the ship for the government during the war went bankrupt later and a lot of records were lost. That list was apparently one of them. So I'm afraid-----"

"What good would the list be, anyhow?" Chet cut in. "If the stuff on the ship was stolen, having a list won't do any good."

"No, here's Frank's idea," Joe interrupted. "If the bulk of the money were in gold bars, as it usually is, not much of it could have been loaded into a flimsy lifeboat. The stuff would be too heavy even if the men weren't caught moving it."

"Eight," Frank agreed. "And I've an idea that Dad might be able to locate the list. There must be one somewhere. A duplicate at some bank."

Perry remained skeptical but at length agreed that it might be worth a try. Accordingly, Frank postponed his dive for the day and the chums hurried back to the hotel. A wire

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was sent immediately to Fenton Hardy, giving complete details and urging the detective to act quickly.

Shortly after supper, when the boys had given up hope of receiving an answer that day, a messenger arrived at the hotel and handed Frank a telegram. The lad's face broke into a broad grin as he scanned the message.

"We have it!" he whooped. "Here's the whole answer. Good old Dad! Listen! 'WASHINGTON BANKERS INFORM ME KATAWA HAD DIAMONDS IN HIDDEN THEFTPROOF SAFE WHEREABOUTS NOW

UNKNOWN ALL OTHER MONEY-CARGO IN GOLD SILVER BARS WEIGHING FIVE HUNDRED POUNDS EACH LOVE DAD."

"Hurray for Dad!" Joe yelled. "Let's get in touch with Mr. Perry right away. There's no doubt now that the *Katawa* is worth the fortune we've hoped!"

Frank hurried to the phone booth in the lobby and rang up the clubhouse. Perry was highly enthusiastic over the news.

"I'll admit that I was more worried over that rumor than I let on," the diver said when his first excitement had died down. "And so were the Cruxes. Fine fix we'd have been in if we'd done all our diving for nothing! Well, I '11 tell John about it right away. We '11 see you in the morning."

This time the chums took no chances on again

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being endangered that night by the mysterious prowler of the previous evenings, so each of them took a three-hour shift on guard. Dawn broke without a sign of the intruder, much to Chet's relief.

John Crux was waiting with a broad grin on his face when the boys drove up to the dock.

"Good work!" he exclaimed. "As I've said before, I don't know what we older fellows would do without you! Tell me, how did you get the list? Come on into the clubhouse. We've lots to talk over."

Frank explained the source of his information concerning the *Katawa's* treasure, and added that he expected further word from his father regarding the location of the diamond safe. When the older Hardy lad had finished, John Crux gazed at the boys earnestly.

"My brother Henry and I have decided to make you young men a present of a thousand dollars apiece for your splendid help, not only in our present problem, but also with the *Corona*. I have the checks ready."

"Mr. Crux!" Frank stood up. "We'd rather wait until the *Katawa's* money has been brought up safely. We-we'd rather not take anything before."

The older man smiled admiringly.

"Very well, I see that your minds are made up. Whatever happens, whether we raise the *Katawa* treasure or not, I shall insist that you accept our reward before you return home."

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The chums thanked their host and hurried down to the dock, where Perry was conversing with a stranger.

"Boys!" he called as they approached. "Here's somebody I want you to meet."

The diver advanced toward them with a short, pleasant-faced chap dressed flashily in loud tweeds and a bright green tie.

"Frank and Joe, this is Mr. Earl Chipsley. The Hardy boys, Earl, and this is Chet Morton," Perry introduced. "Chipsley is a cameraman specializing in undersea pictures."

"Glad to know you all," the cameraman chattered shrilly. "Hardy boys, eh? I've heard of you and your father. Detectives, eh? Fine! Ever do any diving? Ever see an underwater camera? No? Say, wait till you see mine! It's-----"

"Excuse me, Chipsley," Perry interrupted, "but we've a lot of work to do. If you'd care to come out on the barge we'd-----"

"*Care* to! Try to stop me, Perry, old fellow! I want to show you how my new camera works. It's-----"

The momentary confusion of boarding the tender interrupted the talkative newcomer for the time being. On the trip out, however, he fairly bubbled over with enthusiasm concerning his camera, which he told the boys he had invented himself specifically for undersea photography.

"It's wonderful!" he exclaimed. "I came

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all the way down here from New York to try it out when I heard some divers were going after the *Katawa* treasure! Say, Perry, I wonder if I could

borrow one of your diving suits and take my camera down?"

"Let him go down with Frank, Mr. Perry," Joe suggested.

Though the lad hesitated to express his fears about his brother making the descent alone, Joe felt that Frank would be safer with someone else along. There was no indication of possible danger from Kuntz or his friends at the moment, but if something should go wrong at sea-bottom, a second person's help would be valuable.

Finally Perry got consent from John Crux and ordered another new diving suit to be brought out on deck. With a grateful smile Chipsley began to dress and showed two members of the crew how to fasten the camera to the front of his helmet.

"There!" he announced proudly. "How do you like that! Quite a camera, isn't it? I designed it especially to fit on these new diving helmets."

"Certainly is a funny looking gadget," Chet drawled. "What's it supposed to do?"

"Look, it swings down on a hinge and snaps in place right in front of my helmet window, like this," Chipsley demonstrated. "I can see exactly what pictures I am getting. Moving pictures they are, too!"

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Perry smiled dubiously. "Well, I hope it works. Pretty heavy water-pressure down then^ you know."

The fellow was unquenchable. "I realize that," he said confidently, "but water pressure won't hurt *my* camera. You'll see!"

As the crew members screwed down the diving helmets, Perry gave a few last-minute instructions.

"Be careful, Frank, and you too, Chipsley. Don't try to get into the liner," he warned. "She's full of rotten wood and if you fall through you're done for! You can walk on the *ihip* later after we've inspected it and found out which parts are safe and those that aren't."

Chipsley nodded, climbed quickly down the metal ladder alongside the barge rail, and sank from sight. At a signal from Perry, Frank followed. Instinctively the lad drew a deep breath just before the waters closed over his head.

CHAPTER XVII

TRAPPED BELOW THE SURFACE

it seemed to Frank that he never would stop sinking. The ocean was like a vast, bottomless grotto of black liquid in a mysterious world a million miles from the one in which he had been accustomed to living.

He flicked on his light and focussed it downward. Suddenly, from the murky depths below him, a huge shadow seemed to float upward from under his feet. The object apparently had no outline, no beginning, and no end-it was simply a monstrous blotch.

Then, almost before he realized it, the older Hardy lad found himself staring into the gaping funnel of the *Katawa*. There was not an instant to lose. In a twinkling he would be imprisoned within the ship.

With a desperate jerk he twisted the inflation valve on his chest-piece all the way to the right. There was a muffled rush of air, and he could feel its cushioning effect as it filled his suit. An instant later his descent was checked abruptly, not three feet from the yawning mouth of the funnel.

A voice crackled through his radio earphones*.

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"Hello, Frank! Hello, Frank!" it chanted.

"Golly!" was all the lad could gasp.

"Perry talking. Having any trouble?"

No answer. For the moment Frank was more intent upon avoiding his threatened imprisonment than in anything else. His descent had been checked, but for some reason he did not rise. He gave the valve another tug and another. It would not budge. Suddenly a giant fish swam slowly by, and in its eddy the lad drifted away from the funnel.

"Hello, Frank! Frank!" Perry was much alarmed.

"Hello, Mr. Perry! I'm-all right now. j_____»

"What happened! What's the matter?"

"Almost went down the *Katawa's* funnel. Drifted away from it just in time, but there's something wrong with the inflation valve. I can't make myself rise! I'm just suspended here."

"Did you turn the valve all the way to the right?"

" Yes." Desperation made Frank calm as he worked over the valve handle. He knew instinctively that becoming excited would do more harm than good.

"Keep after it, Frank," came Perry's voice reassuringly. "Sometimes they stick pretty tight."

Suddenly the handle turned. There was another rush of air into the suit and the lad shot

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upward. He tested the valve again and again. It worked smoothly.

"It's all right now!" Frank exclaimed with relief. "Works fine."

"You'd better come up, then," Perry urged. "Don't take any more chances with it."

"It's all right, really, Mr. Perry. I'd rather stay down. I don't see the cameraman anywhere as yet."

He released the air in his suit and dropped to the ocean bottom alongside the great black hulk of the rotting liner.

Suddenly a dome-headed figure stepped into the glare of his light! Chipsley! The cameraman waved his hand with the curious slow-motion effect made necessary by the heavy water-pressure. The two could not talk with each other directly, but conversed through Perry up above.

"I've found Chipsley!" Frank exclaimed.

"So he's just informed us," Perry answered. "How are you getting along?"

"Fine! I think he's taking my picture. If I look as queer in this rig as he does in his, I'm afraid I '11 break his camera!"

The photographer had signalled Frank to turn off his light. The lad watched as the other manipulated his motion picture machine.

"He wants you to walk around," Perry announced

Frank found the sensation curious.

"I feel like a feather in a can of molasses."

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Suddenly the cameraman motioned and turned toward the hulk of the *Katawa*.

"He says 'thanks and that's all,' " Perry informed Frank.

The Hardy lad snapped on his light and watched Chipsley. The latter paused for a moment, then shot upward, hugging the side of the ship.

"Hey! Come back here!" Frank yelled instinctively, forgetting that the other diver could not hear him.

"What's the matter?" Perry cut in. "What is that young rascal up to?"

The Hardy boy watched in fascination as the cameraman caught the rail of the *Katawa* and climbed up on deck.

"Frank! Where's Chipsley?" Perry demanded.

"He's-he's on the liner. On the deck," the lad returned, not certain whether to tell on his companion or not.

He heard an exclamation in his earphones, then silence. Perry no doubt was laying down the law to Chipsley, ordering him above for not heeding his warning.

"Frank!"

"Yes, Perry!"

"John Crux has just sent for me to go ashore, so I '11 have to leave. Chipsley says he's coming off the liner now. Be careful, both of you, and

come up soon. I 'm letting Joe handle the radio. So long!"

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Frank watched anxiously for a sign of the cameraman, sweeping his light to and fro throughout the whole length of the ship. Chipsley did not appear.

"Hello, Frank! This is Joe! Is Chipsley with you?"

"No. I'm waiting for him now."

"I can't get an answer from him, Frank!"

A pang of alarm shot through the older Hardy lad. Had the reckless photographer fallen through a rotten timber? He did not have to wait long for an answer.

"Frank! Chipsley just contacted me. Says he fell through the deck! Holy catfish! He doesn't know where he is! He-wait!"

There was a long interval of silence. Then Joe cut in again.

"He says his foot is caught under a heavy beam. He can't move it!"

Frank steeled himself for action.

"Hold on, Joe, I'll see if I can find him. I know just about where he climbed onto the deck."

"Golly, Frank, be careful!"

Frank focussed his light up on the rail where Chipsley had disappeared. Then he eased his way along the hull to a point directly underneath that part of the liner's railing.

He twisted the inflation valve on his chest and slowly drifted upward, hugging the ship's side as he had seen Chipsley do. Fifty feet- a hundred feet-he found himself beside the

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railing. With one hand he closed the inflation valve, with the other he caught hold of a crossbar on the rail. He swung his light over the deck,

which was covered with sea growths of a thousand varieties. It looked more like a gigantic weed-patch than part of a once luxurious ocean steamer.

"Frank! Are you all right?"

"Yes. I'm hanging to the deck rail. Golly, it's dark around here! Can't see anything but what's right in the path of the light."

"Be careful, Frank!" Joe was becoming more anxious, and with good reason. There was only one chance in a million that his brother might find the foolish cameraman without getting himself in hazardous circumstances.

Suddenly Frank's light came to rest at a door leading into a deck cabin. Could Chipsley have gone through it? It seemed to be the logical destination. The deck was a cluttered mass of seaweed, so there was nothing to be gained by traversing it. The cabin door, on the other hand, was directly opposite the point where Chipsley had climbed over the rail. About thirty feet of deck-space lay between. Frank was certain that the cameraman was somewhere inside the cabin, or below it.

"Joe! Is Chipsley still talking to you?"

"Yes. He says to hurry. He thinks he is fainting. He still can't move his foot. The crew up here say we'll have to amputate *ii*, probably, if we can find him in time."

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Frank shuddered. Amputate! Desperately he swung his light around the deck again. Not a sign of broken-through planking. Yet it was hard to be certain, with weeds covering all the space.

He set a foot gingerly down on the deck. To his horror it gave way like rotten rubber. Not a chance of even beginning his thirty-foot journey to the cabin.

Then he edged along the rail a few yards, and this time his test was successful. The deck did not yield.

"Joe! Try to find out just where he fell through!"

"I did. He says he isn't sure. Dazed himself as he fell and when he came to he was lying in a jumble of timbers."

Frank paused, still gripping the rail. The ship lay partly on her side, and the deck sloped downward from where he stood at an angle of forty-five degrees. It would be suicidal to let go the rail and trust the deck to hold as he slid down against the cabin. Still, how else-----

He suddenly thought of the coiled cable attached to his belt. Of course! "Why didn't I think of that before ? " he muttered to himself, rapidly tying one end of the wire to the rail.

He tested it. The barrier seemed solid enough and the wire could be depended upon. Slowly, inch by inch, he reeled out the cable and eased himself toward the cabin.

Up on the barge the men were frantic. Perry

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and John Crux had gone off hastily and left no word of their destination or when they expected to return.

Grizzled Captain Ted Rankin of the barge crew sat tensely beside Joe in the radio room. At brief intervals the younger Hardy lad yanked off his headphones and conferred with the man.

"Frank's trying to cross the deck to a cabin, Captain," Joe cried, receiving his brother's message.

The old man nodded gravely. He had grown exceedingly fond of the Hardys and Chet, and they of him. His face showed his deep concern.

Joe flung off his headphones. "I've got to go down there! Frank needs help! He can never reach Chipsley alone!"

Chet was standing beside them with a puzzled frown. "Let me go, Captain Rankin!" he pleaded quaveringly. " I '11 go down and help!"

The officer turned away for an instant. Then he gazed at the two boys and shook his head slowly.

"No," he said huskily. "There are two in desperate trouble now. We can't risk any more lives."

Joe's eyes flashed. "What are we going to do-let them both die!" he shouted angrily, forgetting himself for an instant.

The elderly man laid a hand on the younger Hardy's shoulder.

" Joe! You know we '11 do everything possi-

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ole. Pete and Jim will go down as soon as they can. But as I told you, they both worked over their limit last night and they can't go down until they've finished their rest period. Otherwise, well, they'll be ruined for diving for the rest of their lives."

The two divers referred to by the Captain had both offered to forego their rest periods and descend again, but Bankin had refused them permission, knowing that the health of both would be permanently impaired if they should do so.

Deep beneath the surface Frank was still easing himself toward the cabin, which seemed farther away at each step. At one time his foot broke through the deck. With a chill of alarm he had waited for the whole patch on which he was standing to give way. Luckily it held.

Suddenly a monstrous shadow blotted out his searchlight beam. In a second it was gone, and the light shone on steadily. He swayed from a strange rush of eddying water about him. Some large fish, no doubt. Just as he prepared to advance another step the misty form swept down upon him once more, only to vanish again.

Frank had read of divers who had been attacked by gigantic creatures of the deep. He wondered if he, too, would be the victim of such a horrible tragedy.

An instant later he was nearly swept from

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his hold on the cable by a powerful eddy of water behind him. Quickly he swung his light backward, then off to one side. With a chill of horror he saw what was happening.

The barge anchor had come loose!

The giant device had been safely lodged in the *Katawa's* superstructure a few moments before. Now, for some reason or other, Frank had scant opportunity to guess why, it was slowly swinging to and fro in a wide, circular motion. He was in almost the exact center of its fateful orbit.

The young diver watched it, transfixed. Each time it swung the orbit became smaller. There was not the remotest possibility of his escaping, he realized with a shudder. Regardless of which direction he moved, a thousand tons of steel would smash him like a fly before he could get away.

If he should remain where he now was, it would be only a matter of moments before the huge weight would crush him to a pulp on the spot. It was like a hideous nightmare come true.

CHAPTER XVII

A DISCOVERY

meanwhile, above on the surface, low, scudding clouds and a rising wind added to the alarm of the barge crew, who as yet knew nothing of the older Hardy lad's added peril. Captain Eankin scanned the heavens anxiously.

"Another forty minutes-or less-" he muttered, "and diving will be impossible."

First Mate Harrison, standing at his superior's side in the wheelhouse, nodded gravely.

"Sea's getting heavier every minute, sir," he said. Suddenly he uttered an exclamation. "By jove, sir! It's half-past eleven! Their limit's up!"

Frank and Chipsley had been down exactly two hours, which was the maximum time allowed for experienced divers working at such a depth,

Eankin turned to the other grimly. "Order Frank Hardy up, Harrison. The least we can do is to save *Mm*. Tell-----"

The officer was interrupted by a cry from the radio room, and Joe burst into the wheelhouse.

"Captain Eankin! Our anchor has broken loose! It's swinging down there with Frank in the middle of it!"

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For once the younger Hardy brother was on the verge of losing his self-control. Without waiting for the captain's answer he turned on his heel and ran down the companionway to the equipment room.

"Give me a suit!" he shouted to an unpleasant looking man standing watch over the apparatus. "Give me a suit! I'm going down!"

The fellow laughed sarcastically. "Be careful, or you'll step on the dynamite, lad."

He indicated a row of powder sticks which had been added to the barge's equipment for possible use in reaching the *Katawa's* vault. Joe attempted to push past the guard to the diving suits in the rear of the room, but the older man gave him a shove that sent the lad sprawling.

"I got no orders to give you a suit!" he snarled. "Go ask the captain if you want anything around here!"

Joe got up and was about to fling himself at the surly watchman when the commander of the vessel appeared.

"Joe! Joe, come here!" he ordered gently. "We're trying to get in touch with Gus Kuntz. He's the only man outside of Perry who could live through a dive now!" He motioned toward the water, which by this time had become a churning cauldron of mountainous, white-capped waves. The barge rolled and tossed unevenly.

"What about that anchor down there, Cap-

A Discovery 157

tain? What about Frank? It's probably too late to-----!"

Captain Rankin clapped a huge palm over Joe's shoulder. "It's all right!" he shouted above the increasing thunder of the wind and water. "We hoisted it up just in time. Frank says he's all right now. Just told Chet so over the radio."

After Joe had left the radio room the plump boy had promptly seized the earphones. He was keeping in constant communication with Frank, shouting encouragement and warnings in rapid succession. Now he met Joe and Rankin at the radio room doorway.

"He won't come up," Chet announced. "He sends his thanks for pulling the anchor out of the way-says it missed him by about half an inch, but at least it *missed* him!"

Joe grinned in relief, but Captain Rankin knitted his brows.

"Frank's been down over two hours now," he said. "That's his limit, fellows. If he doesn't come up pretty quickly he-he may not come up at all."

Suddenly a sailor appeared and touched his beret. " Captain Rankin! Mr. Kuntz says he '11 go down if he's paid three thousand dollars first."

"Three thousand dollars!" Rankin spluttered. "Why-why, that's preposterous!"

"He won't get it!" Joe announced flatly. "I'll go down myself first!"

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"No you won't, my boy," the officer persisted. "This is a job for an old hand at the game-nobody else would ever live through it. Look at that sea!"

A gigantic comber crashed over the lurching vessel as he spoke, drenching them to the skin and nearly knocking them off their feet. Joe found himself flung heavily against the rail. He dashed the water from his eyes.

" Look!" he shouted. " Here comes Perry!"

Manned by four sailors, with the diver seated high up in the stern, was a dory headed in their direction. The barge crew watched, aghast.

" They '11 never make it," muttered one.

"Not in this sea!" confirmed another. "Look! There she goes!"

"Nope!" cried a third. "She's still afloat. Golly!"

The tiny boat, hardly more than, a cockleshell in the grip of that heaving ocean, was making a brave fight. One instant it would rise high on the crest of a tremendous wave, the next it would wallow out of sight in a deep trough. The onlookers watched breathlessly, expecting at any moment to see the dory disappear and never come up again.

Miraculously the sailors kept the tiny shell upright, rowing on desperately. Perry, who was at the helm, was having a fight of his own to keep the bow headed into the wind.

After what seemed an hour, yet in reality was only a few minutes, the boat bounced along-

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side the barge and a rousing cheer could be heard. Ropes were flung rapidly to the victorious seamen, who scrambled up on deck. Perry rushed to the equipment room.

"Heard about everything," he panted from his recent exertion as Joe helped him into a diving suit. "Chet flashed it to the village radio station and they got in touch with me. And is Kuntz furious! He thought he 'd make a fortune out of us; instead, he's sitting there on the dock wearing a scowl that would knock you down. He's watching us through a telescope."

"Serves him right!" Joe snapped. "He'd let his own brother die for the sake of a few dollars! Frank and I'll never rest until he's tucked away in the strongest jail in the country!"

"Good fellows-and I'm with you! Well, wish me luck. Here goes!"

"With a smile Perry waited for an instant while Joe screwed on his helmet. With a cheerful wave of his gloved hand he went overside and disappeared in the foam of a crashing wave. Joe watched for an instant, then dashed to the radio room.

"How's Frank?" he queried anxiously.

Chet handed over the earphones. " Still looking for Chipsley," he drawled. "He's-----"

Down on the tangled deck of the *Katawa* Frank had succeeded finally in reaching the cabin door, now that the threatening anchor had

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been withdrawn. The barge, to be sure, still had two more anchors buried in parts of the submerged steamer but so far these showed no indication of coming loose.

Reaching the entrance he made fast his line, then continued to unreel it as he stepped cautiously into the doorway and played his light through the interior of the black cavity.

To his disappointment the floor appeared to be intact. Where, then, was the cameraman? Of the countless possibilities as to his whereabouts, this one had seemed the most likely. He could see no break in that freak carpet

of vegetation within the room. What could he do now? Nothing but patiently direct his lone search elsewhere. He must be quick, for he was beginning to feel faint.

He twisted his oxygen valve a little further to the right to relieve a slight sensation of stuffiness. To his consternation the valve needle pointed just short of the 'empty' mark. He had barely enough life-giving air to reach the surface if he should start almost at once!

Grimly Frank determined to make one last effort to find the cameraman. He pulled his line taut and turned away from the doorway, reaching out for support against a stanchion. His arm, brushing close to his side, accidentally snapped off his searchlight switch.

Instead of finding himself for the moment in utter darkness, he saw to his amazement an eerie glow emanating from the floor of the

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cabin. For an instant he stared in bewilderment. Then a thought struck him. It was Chipsley's light! It *must* be!

Gingerly he stretched one foot into the cabin and pressed it down through the seaweed. To his astonishment the growths parted, exposing a gaping hole. *There was no floor!*

"Chet! Joe! Who's there?" he yelled into the microphone.

"Hello, Frank, this is Joe. What's up?"

"I've found Chipsley! I'm sure I have. Wait a minute."

He seized the light crow-bar at his belt and poked it down through the weed, swinging it in a widening circle. Suddenly a strong light flashed directly into his eyes.

With a whoop of joy he switched his own lamp back on. About twenty feet below him *was* the cameraman, lying in a tangle of crushed timbers and debris. Feebly Chipsley waved his one free hand, which enclosed a heavy diver's knife.

"I've found him!" Frank shouted into the radio-phone. At the same instant he realized with a chill the significance of the motion Chipsley had made with the steel blade. The cameraman was going to amputate his leg if help did not come soon!

"Is he alive?" Joe asked breathlessly. "He hasn't answered me for the past fifteen minutes."

"He's alive," Frank replied. "He just

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waved to me. Wait! I'm going to try to reach him."

The excitement had its effect on Frank's waning strength, and the lad found himself becoming dizzy on the least exertion. Grimly he resolved to reach Chipsley if it was the last thing he ever did.

Joe's voice crackled down to him again. "Mr. Perry's coming to you, Frank. Can you tell me exactly where you are?"

The lad made an effort to reply. "I-I-" He lapsed into silence, gasping for breath.

"Frank! Frank! What's the matter?" came Joe's frantic query. "Frank! What's happened to you? I can't hear you!"

Frank's head was reeling. What a horrible, lonely death this was to be! he thought, peering blankly through his helmet window. Something seemed to be wrong with his searchlight. Its bright glare had suddenly become feeble. The young diver blinked his eyes, straining to see by the fading rays. No use-his light was going out-or could it be his eyes?

His head spun, and his breath came in quick, short gasps. He found himself sinking toward that gaping hole through which Chipsley had fallen. With a desperate effort he struggled to right himself. It was too late. Blackness swept upon him, and slowly he toppled over into the black void where Chipsley already lay, imprisoned by the wreckage.

CHAPTER XIX

A DANGEROUS MISSION"

" Frank-doesn 't answer!"

Joe and Chet sat white-faced at the radio. The younger Hardy lad, despite his horror at what he now believed to be his brother's fate, remained at his post, earphones glued to his head. Captain Rankin paced slowly back and forth in the little room, his face drawn.

"Perry will find them, boys. There's still a chance!" he said. Despite his effort to sound reassuring, the man knew that there was little hope of saving either Chipsley or Frank.

Perry's clear-cut bass voice crashed through the earphones. "I'm right alongside the *Ka-tawa*. Has Frank told you where he is?"

Joe struggled to keep his voice steady. "He -he doesn't answer, Mr. Perry. Please hurry!"

There was a long interval of silence.

"Ha! They'll never see Frank Hardy again, or Perry either!" snorted a large, powerfully-built man seated in an expensive automobile alongside Reed's Point dock.

" You bet they won't, Mr. Kuntz!" The thin young man beside him smiled cruelly. "This is one time the Hardys are beaten, eh, Simon I"

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The heavy-set ruffian laughed shrilly. " Eight, Bock! And all without us doin' a thing!"

"Nice of Mr. Kuntz to bring down his shortwave radio and cut in on all the broadcastin' out there, isn't it, Pete?"

"Shut up, you fellows, they're talking again," interrupted Kuntz, adjusting the radio dial.

"Any trace of them, Mr. Perry?" came a voice in Kuntz's loudspeaker.

"Not yet, but keep your hopes up," the diver could be heard answering. "I can't move as fast as usual with these extra oxygen tanks on my back. Here, I think I've found a clue! I see a-" His voice trailed away in a jumble of static.

"Shucks!" snapped Kuntz. "These radios-!" Irritably he switched off the machine and picked up a long spyglass.

"Ha! Look at that old barge bounce!" he scoffed, squinting through the eye-piece. "She '11 pull an anchor now any minute, and that'll be the end of Perry and all the rest of 'em, for sure!"

"Serves 'em right for not lettin' *you* go down," Bock remarked. "You're the only diver livin' who could have saved 'em in that sea!"

"You're right, for once," agreed the older man with ill-concealed pride. "But I don't do my work for nothing. I get paid-or else!"

The boys on the barge had heard nothing

A Dangerous Mission 165

from Perry for several minutes. Joe tapped his foot impatiently.

"Serves us right!" Chet was moaning. "Those secret warnings meant what they said, and so did that crazy fellow in the asylum. We should have left the *Katawa* alone in the first place!"

Joe suddenly started from his chair. "Quiet!" he whispered, tense with excitement. "Mr. Perry has found them!" he shouted. "Captain! Chet! He's found Frank and Chipsley!"

Instantly the others were alert, scarcely daring to breathe lest Joe should miss a word in the earphones.

"He says he saw a smudge against the side of the *Katawa* and figured the other two had gone up on deck at that point. He found Frank's cable hitched to the rail, and followed it to where they are. He's there now. Wait!"

Joe listened intently for a moment, then un-clamped the phones from his head. "Frank's hanging suspended over a hole in a cabin floor. His cable saved him from falling through. Great Scott!"

"Is-is Frank-all right!" queried Chet, perspiring freely.

"I don't know yet. Mr. Perry's fastening some extra oxygen tanks to his suit," replied the younger Hardy lad, alternately listening in the earphones and reporting Perry's remarks to the others. "He says he can see Chipsley

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lying under some timbers down in the hole. Oh, if only I could help!"

For a moment the elder Hardy lad was too dazed to know where he was. He remembered that he had made a dive, but outside of that, nothing more. Gradually his blurred vision cleared, and he saw a strange looking figure bending over him. He took a deep breath, and it seemed to him that never before had he experienced as wonderful a sensation as that of rich, pure air pouring into his tortured lungs. Almost instantly his head stopped spinning, and he felt a surge of strength throughout his whole body.

The figure beside him looked strangely familiar despite its weird apparel. Then he began to remember things. Here was Perry, of course! Perry had been on his way down to rescue him, and then he had fainted. The lanky diver suddenly straightened and motioned upward.

"Frank?" It was Joe, he realized with a thrill, calling to him in the earphones.

"Hello, Joe. Yes, I'm fine! Never felt better ! No, I 'm not coming up!"

Perry was still gesticulating violently, but Frank shook his head. "Joe, tell Mr. Perry that I *won't* go up until I've helped him get Chipsley!"

The diver stood still a moment, apparently deceiving Frank's message from Joe. Then he shrugged with a gesture of resignation and

A Dangerous Mission 167

pointed down at Chipsley, beckoning Frank to follow him.

Deftly the diver maneuvered himself through the doorway, knelt at the brink of the hole, and made fast the end of his cable to a heavy steel hook projecting from the deck at the cabin entrance. He tested it twice, carefully lowering himself down beside the trapped cameraman, who lay motionless. Frank followed his friend as quickly as he dared, and the two bent over the still figure. Chipsley's eyes, behind his helmet window-glass, were closed.

Perry worked rapidly. A special device which he had invented for just such an emergency as this enabled him to remove an empty oxygen cylinder and substitute a fresh one without the possibility of admitting water either to the suit or to the cylinder. In a twinkling Chipsley's supply had been replenished.

Frank, meanwhile, had been investigating the wreckage that covered the lower half of the cameraman's body. Not one of the great shattered timbers could he budge.

He happened to glance at Chipsley's face. To his joy he saw that the man's eyes were open.

"Chipsley's conscious!" he exclaimed into his microphone.

"Good!" cried Joe. "Can you move him?"

"Not yet. Mr. Perry's coming over to help me now. He just fastened on Chipsley's oxygen supply."

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The diver moved to Frank's side, and together the two heaved at the topmost timber. It yielded slightly, then stopped. The diver straightened, tapped Frank on the shoulder, and pointed upward.

"Mr. Perry says you must come up, Frank," Joe insisted over the microphone.

Again the stalwart lad shook his head. "Tell Mr. Perry I'm going to stay as long as he does. He can never move this debris alone."

The diver tapped his head significantly and looked at Frank in the manner of a strange sea-monster staring at another of the same species.

"Mr. Perry says he thinks you're crazy, but to go ahead and help him if you insist!" Joe called down.

For some time the two divers worked desperately. Chipsley suddenly closed his eyes as a heavy beam was loosened under the debris. Frank nudged Perry and pointed at the cameraman. The diver nodded, and plunged his hands beneath a mass of seaweed over Chipsley's ankle.

"Mr. Perry says he has found the timber that's causing most of the trouble, Frank. He wants you to put your hands down opposite his."

Perry, with both hands occupied, had been unable to signal his order to Frank. Now the Hardy lad reached in according to Joe's directions and felt the end of a huge block of wood.

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Perry nodded and they both lifted simultaneously.

Frank thought his back would snap in two, yet he struggled desperately. He knew that failure to free Chipsley very soon would mean that the cameraman's leg would have to be amputated. The lad's strength seemed to be melting into nothingness, when suddenly the timber gave way and rolled slowly from them. Chipsley's leg was freed!

The cameraman, weakened almost to the point of helplessness by his ordeal, had to be pulled up through the opening at the end of Perry's extra cable. Then, when the trio stood precariously on the vessel's tilted deck, Perry lashed Frank and Chipsley together. Miraculously he produced a third cable, knotted at intervals, and attached one end to a deck ring. He gave the coil to Frank.

"Frank?" came Joe's voice again.

"Yes?"

"There's something wrong with Chipsley's inflation valve," he said, "so Mr. Perry has lashed you two together. You'll have to carry him up."

"Right. We're ready."

Perry waited a moment, testing the lashing several times, and taking one or two extra turns with the cable. Then he stepped back and nodded to Frank.

There was a muffled hiss of intrushing air as the older Hardy lad turned his valve, and the

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two gently soared upward. Perry waved, and gradually faded away into the perpetual night of the ocean bottom.

"Frank! Chipsley says it was the treasure room he fell into!" Joe cried excitedly into his brother's earphones when the ascending divers made their first halt. "Says he has a picture of the whole thing. The location of some diamonds, too!"

Frank was skeptical. "He must have found a lot more than Mi-. Perry and I did," he laughed. "I didn't see anything but seaweed and wreckage down there!"

It was like a strange dream, this talking back and forth through a radio while suspended in the black, silent waters.

"Chipsley claims that he has a special X-ray lens on his camera that won't stop at little things like seaweed and mud. He says that if there's any gold under all the muss in that room his camera has recorded it."

"Well, we'll be up before long and find out," Frank returned. "Get the photographic room ready now, Joe, and we'll develop the pictures just as soon as we're back on deck."

After what seemed an eternity the inky blackness of the water gradually merged into a deep brown, then finally into a green. Suddenly, before Frank realized how close they were to the surface, a burst of light struck him. At the same instant something picked them up and flung them high into the air.

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Frank rubbed his hands over his helmet glass. To his astonishment he and Chipsley, lashed together, were riding the crest of a mountainous wave.

" There they are!" cried Joe, who had been on the lookout.

It was a hazardous undertaking to lower a boat and proceed to the rescue. Captain Rankin picked eight of his stoutest sailors for the task, which occupied nearly half an hour. Chipsley, who was too exhausted to speak, suddenly col-, lapsed on deck.

"Put him in the compression chamber quick!" ordered Captain Rankin. "Frank, you'll have to go in too. Both of you young men were below the surface far too long for your own good, although I'm certainly thankful that you returned!"

" So am I!" said the older Hardy lad weakly, trying to grin. "Joe, do a good job on those pictures. Chipsley may have found something after all."

While Frank and the cameraman were being taken below deck to the giant compression cylinder, Joe and Chet went to the developing room. They opened Chipsley's camera and removed a large roll of exposed film.

Would the pictures reveal any of the *Ka-tawa's* secrets?

CHAPTER XX

UNWELCOME VISITORS

"whebe am I?"

Chipsley's eyes were suddenly open and staring. Frank laughed. The two lads were lying side by side on small cots within what resembled a large steam boiler.

The walls were of heavy steel plating and the door, also of steel, was hermetically sealed. There were two small windows of double plate glass and above them, near the top, were rows of projecting tubes.

"They call this a compression chamber," the Hardy lad declared, "but I think they've put us in the brig for misbehavior!"

Chipsley smiled weakly. "I-I guess they've a right to put *me* in the brig, but as for you-----"

"Now, never mind that, Earl!" Frank replied comfortingly, seeing the cameraman's look of remorse. "If your pictures turn out as well as we hope, everything will be all right."

" How long do we have to stay in here ?"

"About two hours, I think. They pump in an air pressure equal to the pressure on us down at the *Katawa*, then they gradually re-

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lease it. Supposed to keep us from getting the 'bends.' "

Joe and Chet, in the meantime, worked eagerly at the task of developing Chipsley's films. At length everything was ready. Chet snapped out the light and the younger Hardy lad started the projector motor. There was a muffled whr-r-r, and the blank screen on the wall suddenly became alive with a myriad of fish.

"Look!" Chet exclaimed breathlessly.

The picture indeed was a masterpiece. The hull of the sunken *Katawa* suddenly appeared before their eyes, then a figure in a diving suit.

"That's Frank!" Joe squealed in delight. "Oh, this is great! But I wonder-----"

He paused as the scene changed to a close-up of the sunken steamer's deck. Suddenly there was a jumbled blur lasting for perhaps half a minute.

"Look at those timbers floating around!" Chet pointed. "And-----"

"That must be the cabin Chipsley fell into," Joe surmised. " See, he's showing a picture of his feet, buried under all that rubbish and debris. And-look, Chet!"

The scene suddenly shifted again, this time to a wall of the cabin. Stacked alongside one another were literally scores of large oblong blocks of a decidedly yellow tint.

"The *Katawa's* gold!" breathed Joe.

The camera shifted to the opposite side. There, about halfway to the ceiling, was re-

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vealed a small opening through which could be seen something flashing at intervals.

"It's-Chet, do you suppose that's the diamond safe!" Joe grabbed the fat boy's sleeve.

"Wouldn't be surprised," returned the other. "When his headlamp is in a certain position the jewels reflect the rays."

" Exactly. At least that's what it looks like. Wait! See what's happening now!"

Miraculously the opening in the wall seemed to come toward them on the screen, enlarging rapidly. Now they could see the interior clearly.

"Look, Chet, they *are* jewels! Rows of them. Necklaces, bracelets, unset jewels in cases! Great Scott! I can't believe we're really seeing all this!"

"Some camera, I'll say!" murmured Chet fronderingly. "What did he call it? X-ray lens or something?"

"Yes. Said it could take pictures through wood or steel or almost any obstruction, depending on how he set some trick mechanism attached to it. I'll say it's a wonderful camera! Come on, Chet, we must tell Chipsley and Frank!"

The boys rushed down to the compression chamber where Captain Eankin stood watching a panel of pressure-gauges on the outside of the bolted steel door. The officer looked grave.

"Why Captain, what's the matter?" Joe queried in sudden alarm.

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"You lads were busy, so I didn't bother you," the officer replied. "But we had to send young Chipsley to shore to a hospital about half an hour ago. He fainted in the chamber ancj couldn't be revived."

"Oh! Gee, I hope-----"

"He's on the hospital danger list, and I'm afraid he has a hard fight ahead of him. But Frank is just about ready to come out."

A few minutes later the huge steel door was unbolted and the older Hardy lad stepped out eagerly.

"How are the pictures?" he queried.

"Marvelous, Frank5 Come on into the dark room and see for yourself!"

At that instant a shout went up from the starboard lookout.

"Diver up! Diver up on the sta'b'd bowl" chanted the sailor on watch.

"It's Perry!" Frank whooped. "And he'll be just in time to view our private moving picture show!"

The storm had now abated, and it was a matter of only a few moments to bring the diver back aboard the barge. John Crux arrived from the dock at

the same time.

"Well," laughed the official, "this is a regular family reunion, isn't it? Somebody here radioed to town that *I* was wanted."

He paused and gazed around inquiringly.

"I did, Mr. Crux," Chet said. "We have some pictures we thought you ought to see."

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Joe led the group to the dark room and quickly started Chipsley's machine. Perry and his superior watched in amazement. "Why, that camera is incredible!" Crux exclaimed when the picture ended. "It's worth a million!"

Perry was equally impressed. "There's no limit to what it can be used for under sea," he declared. "Not to mention the help it will be to us now in getting the treasure. We might have had to blow the whole ship apart to find the treasure room."

"That's true, Perry," nodded John Crux. "These pictures will be invaluable to us!"

The tall fellow seemed to be pondering something. Suddenly he looked up. "I've a suggestion. Now that Chipsley's in the hospital, why not let the Hardys use his camera, take any pictures we may want, and sell us the films! We 'll give Earl a substantial part of each payment. "

John Crux agreed that the idea was a good one, and the chums were highly enthusiastic. They were not the only ones, however. An old man, standing in the narrow corridor just outside the dark room where the conference was taking place, was listening intently.

"Ha!" he muttered to himself. "They will make me no thin' but a watchman around here, will they? I'll show 'em!"

Perceiving that the conference was breaking up, he scurried around a corner with remark-

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able agility for one of his bent, gnarled frame. A moment later he waddled up to First Mate Harrison and touched his slouch hat.

"Reportin' off duty, sir," he said in a thready voice.

"All right, Garret," snapped the officer.

The old man climbed into a dory with a group of seamen going off for the night. He got a glimpse of the Hardys pushing away in another skiff.

"They won't have their camera for long!" he growled with an evil glint in his eye. On the dock he disappeared in the confusion.

Meanwhile, two young, unkempt-looking men were seated in a dingy Greek restaurant near the tiny hamlet of Reed's Point.

"Well, it's six o'clock," said Pete Simon, drawing out his watch. "Garret promised he 'd be here now."

"Maybe he's double-crossed us," muttered Bock irritably. "Maybe he didn't find out anything anyhow."

Simon stirred a cup of greasy coffee. Just then the door rattled open, and an old man, his hat pulled well down over his eyes, slouched in.

"It's Garret!" hissed Bock. "Hey, you, here we are! What you got to report?"

"Well, I s'pose you know all about the rescue of them two upstarts, and---
---"

"Yes, yes!" Bock interrupted impatiently. "We found out all that, or most of it, over Kuntz's radio along with a lot o' static. But

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what of that camera we heard 'em talkin' about? How did the pictures turn out?"

"Good!" exclaimed the old man. "Wonderful, in fact! Listen!"

He talked in an undertone for several moments. Bock's thin lips curved into a smile when the watchman had finished.

"Fine, Garret. We'll see that you're rewarded when the time comes. Good work I"

The two scoundrels arose and were off before the old man had time to move. They turned a corner and approached a parked automobile.

"Drop me at the hospital, Pete. I'll try to fix up the deal with this Chipsley fellow while you go tell Kuntz about it."

Ten minutes later Simon appeared at the village hotel and asked for his unscrupulous leader. He was directed to the latter's room, and shortly afterward emerged, smiling cruelly. Down in the lobby, Bock had just entered.

"What's Kuntz think about it?" Bock whispered, pulling his friend into a corner.

"He says O. K. Tells us we must get the camera one way or another." He winked significantly at Bock. "He'll pay us plenty for it What about Chipsley?"

"Can't see him. They wouldn't let me in. Doctor says he's too sick. Well, at least we made the attempt to buy it on the level from Chipsley."

"Yeah, and now that he's sick that ain't our fault! Only one thing left to do."

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"Take it from the Hardys!"

A short while later Bock rapped sharply on the chums' hotel door.

"Come in!" sang out Frank. The older Hardy lad, Chet and Joe were reviewing the precious film before putting it away for safekeeping.

Joe snapped on the lights and peered in amazement at two visitors, who stood in silence.

"What do you fellows want?" demanded Frank.

Bock advanced toward them. "Listen, we're here on a friendly basis. We want to make a deal with you for Chipsley's camera."

"I'm sorry," Joe cut in coldly, "but we're not interested in making any deal with you."

For an instant Bock glared at the chums as if he were a tiger. Then, with a sudden cry, he lunged toward the bureau where the camera lay. Simon charged up behind him.

Joe moved like greased lightning. In a twinkling he had snatched the apparatus from Bock's reach. At the same time Frank caught the ruffian with a full blow on the point of his chin. As the scrawny fellow went sprawling, Simon dived for Joe.

The impact knocked over the projector and jarred loose the spool of film. It went spinning across the room just in time for Bock to land on it with both feet. Seeing what had happened, he ground it into the carpet with a shrill laugh.

CHAPTER XXI

A QUANDARY

with a cry Frank jumped for the fellow, but Bock was already headed for the door, with Simon at his heels. In the confusion Chet, making a desperate grab at Simon's coat, accidentally collided with Frank. Before the two could disentangle themselves the scoundrels had disappeared.

Joe gloomily picked up the crushed film.

"It's ruined!" he blurted out.

The telephone suddenly rang and Perry's voice came breezily into the receiver. "Henry Crux has just arrived from Washington," the diver told Frank. "He and his brother want to see the pictures at once to figure out the best way to remove the treasure. Can you bring them over? What? Something's happened? All right, I'll expect you immediately."

Frank turned away from the phone. "Joe, how's the camera? And the projector?"

The younger Hardy lad had been inspecting them. "They seem to be all right, so far as I can tell," he replied. "Though why the projector wasn't wrecked completely is beyond me."

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""Well, I've an idea; in fact, it's the only thing left for us to do."

"What's that?"

"We'll have to persuade the Cruxes and Mr. Perry to let us go down and take the pictures over again."

"What! Go there and get caught in those timbers in that wrecked cabin!" exclaimed Chet, aghast at the suggestion. "Why, you'd be crazy!"

"It wouldn't be so difficult this time," Frank replied. " I know my way around better!"

"Well, let's be off," his brother urged. "The men are probably biting their nails wondering what it is you said had happened to us."

It was pitch dark when they drove up to the dock and found Perry impatiently awaiting them.

"What's happened? Anything go wrong?" he queried anxiously.

Frank recounted the latest incident and insisted that he and Joe be allowed to descend again and make new films.

"The scoundrels!" Perry muttered. "Well, you're right, there's nothing to do but take the pictures over. We'll have to work fast, though. It's almost the end of the diving season now and the weather's about to put a stop to everything until next Spring."

The Hardys were only too eager to make the descent together. While they were dressing, Frank described for Joe's benefit the method

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they would have to use to reach the cabin safely.

Suddenly Perry lowered his head through the doorway of the equipment room. The diver was scowling.

"Barometer's falling fast," he announced. "We're due for a blow any minute, fellows."

"Does that mean we can't go?" Frank inquired with a shock of disappointment.

"I'm afraid so," Perry responded. "Too dangerous. You'd better get back to shore while there's still time and return here tomorrow."

Disgruntled and impatient at the delay, the chums took a skiff to the dock and drove slowly toward the hotel.

"Incidentally, I'm hungry!" Chet declared as they rolled past a roadside tavern. "How about stopping here for a sandwich?"

For once the Hardys' usual good humor failed to rally.

"You can eat when we get back to the hotel, Chet," Frank said a trifle impatiently. "Besides, look at the sky. It's going to storm soon."

Unknowingly the chums thereby avoided what might have meant serious trouble, for at that very minute three men were seated at a table in the tavern. One of them, considerably older than the others, was frowning blackly.

"I've never sent you two on an errand yet when you didn't fail!" he snorted, glaring at his companions.

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Bock flushed. "I tell you, Zuntz, we tried our best to get the camera! We tried every way we knew, didn't we, Pete?"

"We sure did, Mr. Kuntz! Honest! But what can you expect, with three against two? Anyhow, we busted up their films."

"Ya mean *I* busted their films!" sneered Bock. "You didn't do a thing but stand there and get your fat face punched!" He laughed scornfully.

Simon turned on his companion with a snarl.

"Oh, keep quiet!" snapped Kuntz. "You two make me sick! I don't care what you did. You didn't get the camera. And I need it for a new diving job I think I'm getting. With that camera I'll be able to make the dive and bring up the money without running any risk at all!"

"Which ship, Mr. Kuntz?" Bock inquired.

"Oh, what's the difference?" growled the man. "The point is that it's going to be as dangerous a job as any I ever tackled. With that camera to locate the strong-room I'd be able to do the work without any trouble at all."

The diver finished his sandwich without another word, then arose and reached for his hat.

"I'm going back to the hotel," he grumbled, and stalked out.

Bock winked at his companion.

"Listen, Pete. If that camera is really worth as much as everybody seems to think, why don't we get it for ourselves? We'll sell it to some other diving outfit and make a fortune!"

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Simon grinned and the two went into a long discussion. It was late when they finally ceased muttering together, paid their sandwich check, and disappeared into the darkness.

Frank and his chums, in the meantime, sat in the hotel lobby watching the heavy rain dash wildly against the windows.

"So much water around we can't dive!" Joe observed ironically. "Might as well turn in, I guess."

"You're right," his older brother agreed. "Better wake Chet."

The stout lad, after eating a late sapper, had gone to sleep in his chair. Joe grabbed him by the collar.

"Come on, Detective Morton!" he laughed. "Time to do your sleeping in a bed."

Chet roused himself with a groan. "All right," he mumbled. "I'm ready. Wonder if anybody'll visit us tonight. We haven't had any prowlers for a while."

"It is a good night for murders and things like that!" Frank teased as the wind howled outside. "But I think we'll be safe."

Little did Chet realize what a prophecy he had uttered. The first thing the chums spied upon entering their hotel room was a large penciled sign pinned to one of Frank's spare jackets which was hanging on a chair.

"Great Scott!" Joe exclaimed, running up to the coat. "We've had a visitor!"

The message was the most emphatic warning

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they had received yet. "Frank Hardy's Next Visit to the *Katawa* will be his *last!*" it read ominously.

Chet's eyes popped. "What did I tell you!" he exclaimed. "And look, the note is pinned directly over the left-hand breast pocket, Frank. Eight where your heart is."

"I believe our Chet is getting superstitious in his old age!" Frank laughed. " Shucks, these secret warnings are becoming a jokel"

Morning dawned bright and clear without further incident, and the chums went down for an early breakfast. The discussion turned inevitably to the mysterious warning of the night before.

"You know, I've an idea that some person other than Kuntz and his friends is responsible for the warnings we've been getting," Joe suggested between mouthfuls of oatmeal.

"I think Bock and Simon are back of everything," Chet declared flatly. "Who else would be sending the notest They're the ones who have been following us around and making trouble ever since we first started."

"I'm tempted io agree with Joe," Frank decided. " From the glimpse I had of the prowler the other night, I'm inclined to think he doesn't look like anybody we've ever met."

"Oh, you couldn't tell. He was all wrapped up in some sort of a black coat." Chet returned.

"Well, whoever he is, or was, we'll probably find out soon enough," Joe said, terminating

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the argument. "It's getting late. Let's be off."

They drove rapidly to the dock, where a sailor whisked them into the barge tender and steered them out to the anchored vessel. Perry greeted them with a shout.

"We're all ready for you, fellows!" he called.

Quickly the brothers donned their diving suits and listened intently as Perry gave them a few final suggestions.

"Good luck!" he wished them. "We'll be listening in while you work. Chet is to be the chief radio operator. Let us know how you're making out."

Joe made a last-minute adjustment on Chips-ley's camera, then together the lads eased themselves into the water. Some minutes later they were standing side by side near the hull of the gaunt wreck three hundred feet below the surface.

Frank beckoned for his brother to follow him, and they plodded through the mud and vegetation to the point where the older Hardy boy previously had ascended to the steamer's deck. Suddenly there was heard a sharp crackle in Frank's earphones.

"Frank! Frank I" came Chet's agitated voice.

"What is it, Chet?"

"Joe says to look behind you! Quick!"

The older Hardy lad turned just in time to see a monstrous octopus wrap its tentacles around Joe's struggling body

CHAPTER XXII

A GHOST IN THE DARK

Frank uttered a yell of alarm, and vaguely heard Chet scream something back into the microphone. Without a second's hesitation the lad drew out his diver's knife and lunged toward the monster. It seemed an eternity until he could cover the short space that separated them.

Joe meanwhile had managed to withdraw his own knife, but the sea beast's powerful tentacles pinned his arms motionless. Gradually the creature was crushing him in its terrible death-grip.

With a quick jerk Frank released his inflation valve. Almost instantly he rose in mid-water, hovering over the combatants. The creature spied him.

With its snake-like arms rippling menacingly, the octopus dropped the younger Hardy lad and shot toward Frank. The latter had hoped for this move, though his plan was a desperate one.

A second later Frank felt a heavy, squirming cord wrap itself around his waist and pull him relentlessly toward the monster's huge, hideous body. It was to be now or never. He waited a

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split second until the creature was hugging him close, crushing him.

"With his hand jammed tightly between his own body and that of the octopus, he plunged the knife to the hilt into the horrible, jelly-like mass against him. In the brief instant that followed, before the sea-devil could recover from the shock of the wound and tighten its grip around him, the lad slashed to and fro furiously.

Out of the corner of his helmet window he caught a glimpse of Joe fighting with the creature. The monster suddenly dived into the marshy bottom and immediately the water became thick with churned seaweed and mud. Instantly Frank realized that he and his brother might accidentally cut

each other, so he ceased fighting, expecting at any second to be caught again in the squirming tentacles.

To his relief he felt no movement other than the gentle nudge of an occasional clump of weed. He backed away from the scene. Luckily his searchlight had not been damaged; he swung it toward where he had last seen the giant sea-devil. For a moment he could distinguish nothing; there was too much thick sediment in the water all about him. Suddenly there was a flash of light, and Joe emerged from the cloud. Frank uttered a whoop of joy.

The younger Hardy tapped his brother on the shoulder and focussed his light on the bottom a few feet away. As the mud and seaweed

A Ghost in the Dark 189

gradually settled, Frank could discern the tangled outline of the dead monster.

Only then was he conscious of a voice shouting in his earphones. "Frank! Frank! Answer me! Frank!"

"Hello. Chet?"

"Thank goodness! What happened? I've been calling you for ten minutes or more. What's been going on down there? We've been calling Joe too, and haven't been able to get an answer!"

"Sorry, Chet, but we've just had a little rumpus with an octopus! Yes, really I bet he measures twenty feet across! He has more arms than I can count!"

Motioning to Joe, Frank continued his interrupted course to the deck of the liner.

"Hello. Chet! Tell Joe to inflate his suit. We're ready to go up on the *Katawa's* deck."

He watched his brother, and a moment later saw him reach for the valve on his chest. Frank did likewise, and the two boys rose slowly along the side of the sunken liner. Both clambered over the rail at the same time.

Before they had commenced their descent Frank had instructed his brother minutely in the technique necessary to reach the wrecked cabin. Now, at a signal from Frank, Joe nodded and made his cable fast to the rail. Inch by inch he advanced toward the doorway. Frank waved and turned toward the bow of the vessel. He had decided that while Joe was photograph-

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ing the treasure room, he would explore as much of the rest of the ship as time would permit.

Carefully he pulled himself along the rail to the forepart of the vessel. Then, using his cable as a safety device, he unreeled his way to the main forward deck lounge. The floor here was intact, and he entered the room.

"What are you doing now, Frank?" Chet inquired after a long silence.

"Exploring. Golly, Chet, you ought to come down! Really, you 'd never forget it!"

"That's exactly what I'm afraid of!" returned the stout boy with a dry laugh. "No, I'd just as soon listen to you do the underwater travelogues!"

"Chet, I'm in a stateroom now. Bunks and everything! There's a bathtub. Ha! Looks like a potted plant, with all the seaweed and stuff growing in it."

"Be careful you don't get lost!"

"Don't worry. My cable follows me wherever I go. It's getting pretty short now, so I guess I'll have to go back. How's Joe getting along?"

"All right, he says. He's in the treasure room but is sure there's a lot more to it. Another chamber he thinks lies behind a pile of timbers and junk. He says he can't move any of the stuff."

"Tell him not to try. He might bring it all down on his head."

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Another interval of silence. Frank carefully picked his way along the silent corridors, turning his light into staterooms and lounges that once had rung with the sounds of merrymaking. The whole situation was weird and

thrilling beyond anything he had ever dreamed of. It was lonesome too, for an occasional fish was his only company in that eternal blackness.

He glanced at the helmet clock. As if in answer to his thoughts, Chet's voice spoke again.

"Frank, Mr. Perry says it's time to come up. Joe's already on his way. Tells me he has some wonderful pictures."

Forty-five minutes later the chums were reunited back on the barge deck. Perry grinned at them proudly.

" You '11 be professionals yet, fellows! Fighting octopuses, and everything. I haven't had a battle like that myself for nearly ten years!"

Captain Eankin and the members of his crew were loud in their praises of the brothers' daring.

"Too bad you couldn't have taken a picture of that fight, boys," the first mate remarked.

"I did!" exclaimed Joe. "I forgot all about that part of it! I snapped on the camera when I first saw the octopus. When he grabbed me, I was too busy fighting with him to think of turning the machine off even if I'd wanted to!"

The boys herded themselves into the dark room, scarcely able to wait until they could develop the pictures.

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"I certainly hope that octopus film turns out O. K.," Joe remarked. "But the main thing we're interested in is the treasure room. If my surmise is correct, there's more valuable stuff in there than we ever dreamed about!"

After an interval of impatient waiting on the part of all three Joe announced that the films were ready. Trembling with anticipation, they wound the reel on the spool and started up the projector.

The results were beyond their wildest hopes. The moving picture revealed, in addition to the brothers' dramatic struggle with the sea-devil, a large number of tiny wall safes in the treasure room, each apparently containing thousands of dollars' worth of jewels.

Joe jumped up in the middle of the showing and dashed from the room. In a moment he was back with Perry and the two Crux brothers who had been awaiting the boys' report on the films.

"Start it over, Frank," Joe said.

"Right."

Once again the machine buzzed. The diving officials and Perry were highly enthusiastic.

"We won't need dynamite after all," John Crux remarked when the film had run out. "Thank goodness for that!"

"No, we can haul the jewels out by hand. I think the gold and silver bars can be moved out by our deep sea derrick if the ship's superstructure is sheared off first," replied his brother Henry.

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"Oxyacetylene deep sea torches will accomplish the shearing easily enough," Perry added. "We have some new ones, you know."

"This is all too complicated for me," Chet suddenly blurted out. "I guess I just wasn't meant to be a diver." He laughed drolly and the others joined him.

"Nothing to it, Chet," smiled Perry. "If you'd only make a dive once you'd see where the superstructure is overhanging the cabin we want to reach with the derrick, and-----"

"No thanks, Mr. Perry!" responded the fat boy emphatically. "I'll stick to the radio operating part of it if you don't mind!"

"Now we'd all better go ashore and call on Chipsley," Perry suggested. "He's much improved, and is waiting to sign the agreement about the camera. I radioed his doctor this morning to ask him."

"Just a second while I stow our suits away in the equipment room," said Joe. He picked up the diving apparel from a bench and went below.

"Here they are," he said, handing them to the watchman. Then he remembered that this was the same unpleasant looking fellow who had

refused to let him come in the day before, and had knocked him down for his attempt.

"Oh, it's you again, eh!" retorted the guard. "Well, give me the stuff. And watch out for them dynamite sticks."

"I'm not anywhere near your explosives."

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"That's the trouble with everybody," muttered the old man in reply. "Nobody comes near the stuff. They hire me to watch it, and then decide they don't want it after all. I suppose they'll be firin' me any time now."

Joe suddenly felt sympathetic. Obviously the old fellow needed his job and was afraid of losing it.

" I '11 speak to Mr. Perry," Joe said. " Maybe he'll give you something else to do if he doesn't need you here any longer. What's your name t"

" Garret. Hank Garret," grumbled the other, apparently not particularly convinced by Joe's offer.

When the lad had disappeared the old man looked down sorrowfully at the stack of dynamite on the floor. Then he sighed. " Oh, what's the use of watching this stuff!" he muttered to himself.

He walked across the room, picked up a burlap bag, and rolled it up against the baseboard of the wall. After that he curled himself up on the floor, and with the bag for a pillow, dropped off to sleep.

An old ship's clock in the room sounded eight bells. The sleeping guard stirred, then settled back again, turning his withered face away from the dim electric light in the ceiling. Outside it was growing dark.

Suddenly a black, shrouded figure crept up to the doorway and peered in at the motionless form on the floor.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MISSING CAMERA

For a moment the figure hesitated, watching the sleeping guard intently. Then, still muffled in a great black cloak, it crept into the room.

Suddenly footsteps sounded in the corridor and a sailor, humming softly to himself, approached the doorway. The shrouded figure instantly flattened itself behind a large crate.

Fortunately for the intruder, the seaman was on his way elsewhere and did not so much as pause to look inside. In a moment all was still again.

The black ghost glided over to the stack of dynamite and stood contemplating the powder sticks for several moments. A gloved hand suddenly shot forth from the folds of the garment. Then, almost as quickly as it had appeared, the figure melted back into the darkness outside the doorway and was gone.

The Hardys and Chet in the meantime were just leaving the hospital with Perry.

"I certainly feel sorry for Chipsley, poor chap," Frank said. "The doctors don't give him much chance of recovering before six or eight months."

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"He can be thankful that he's alive at all," Perry remarked. "People usually don't live through an ordeal like his!"

"But when he does get well," Joe added, "he'll be a rich man. That camera of his is going to make him a fortune in no time at all."

"Thanks to you boys for operating it," Perry rejoined. "You've been more help to us than -well, as John Crux says, without you I don't know where our diving company'd be now."

"Shucks, we haven't done anything much," Frank said seriously. "Wait till we really get the *Katawa's* treasure up and Kuntz in prison. Then we may do a bit of bragging."

The chums laughed heartily, knowing that Frank would be the last person in the world to boast of any of his exploits, regardless of their importance.

At length they reached the dock and Perry jumped out. "I still prefer the barge to a hotel," he declared, as they drove off. "Don't like to waste time sleeping when I'm on a job. Like to keep in touch with the men."

It was true that the diver worked almost without rest. He took brief naps at intervals on the barge, but most of his time was spent either in the radio room talking with his fellow workers, or in diving.

Much as the Hardys would have liked to live on the barge with Perry, they knew that part of their task was to keep Kuntz at bay until the *Katawa* job should be finished, then take steps

The Missing Camera 197

to put the unscrupulous diver and his colleagues in prison. Thus they found it necessary to divide their time between the scene of diving operations and the hotel. Frank pushed open the door of their room and uttered an ejaculation.

"Don't tell me it's another warning!" shuddered Chet behind him.

"What is it?" Joe edged around his brother, who stood staring at a large object on the floor.

"Dynamite!" Frank yelled. "A stick of dynamite! And look, here's another note!"

A scrap of paper lay under the powder stick. On it was the familiar penciled scrawl, this time reading, "You are all doomed to die a horrible death within forty-eight hours!"

Chet gulped in sudden terror. Then jog burst out, "Oh, now I know where all these warnings have been coming from!"

His brother looked at him quizzically.

"It's the watchman in the equipment barge, just as sure as you're alive!"

"What makes you think that, Joe?" inquired Frank.

"Well, I've had some words with him already. He's a nasty old fellow. Garret's his name. Tried to knock me down when I wanted a diving suit the day you and Chipsley were caught in the cabin. *And lie guards the dynamite!*"

"Well, that might be," his brother agreed. "Still, I-----"

"I shouldn't be surprised if that Garret chap

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isn't Bock or Simon dressed up in a disguise," Chet suggested.

Joe smiled. "That would have to be *so*nt-disguise! Why, Garret's an old man."

"It sounds as if Joe is right," Frank said, "because I just happened to notice this little label on the end of the stick. 'For Crux Brothers,' it says. There isn't any doubt that it was stolen from the barge supply."

That night the chums again took turns standing guard. The following morning they hastened to the dock to inform Perry of the incident. The diver was furious when he heard their tale.

"That fellow loses his job right now for that!" he stormed. "What have we got him for, if not to be a watchman?"

"Of course, he may not have done it himself," Joe interceded.

"Whether he did or not makes no difference," the diver replied. "Either he did it or he let somebody else do it. And it looks pretty much as if he is guilty. For all we know, he may be in Kuntz's pay right now!"

The watchman was immediately discharged, and a member of the regular crew was chosen to take his place. Garret was bitter as he rowed ashore in a skiff.

"Somebody's going to pay for this!" he threatened, shaking his fists toward the barge.

The chums soon forgot the ugly fellow in the work at hand. There was plenty to be done,

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even though Perry's full staff of diving assistants had taken all available diving suits and the boys found that they must remain on the barge for the day.

John Crux sent for them shortly after they had arrived and took the boys into his confidence regarding detailed plans for raising the treasure. The conference lasted all morning, with Perry joining them at intervals. The Hardys were gratified when the older men accepted many of their suggestions regarding ways and means of removing the *Katawa's* valuable cargo.

During the afternoon they sat in the radio room talking back and forth to Perry and the other divers working on the sunken vessel. The day passed without incident, and nightfall found the brothers on their way back to the hotel. Chet had decided to remain in the radio room a while longer, promising to return at bedtime.

"Let's get a good night's sleep, Frank," suggested the younger Hardy lad after supper.

There was a loud knock on their door as they commenced to undress. Frank went to see who it was, and an old man rudely pushed his way in.

"Are you the Hardys? Ah!" He stood surveying them with bloodshot eyes, rocking back and forth unsteadily on his heels.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" Frank demanded.

"He's drunk," said Joe. "What do you want here, Garret?"

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The man glared at the younger Hardy lad, and his lips curled into a snarl. "So I 'm drunk, am I? Well, we '11 see about that!" Before the boys could move, the discharged watchman whipped out a small blackjack and hurled it at Joe's face.

"That'll teach you to get people fired from their jobs, you young scamp!" he screamed as the lad ducked. The missile whizzed over his head and crashed into Chipsley's camera which was lying on a table.

Frank leaped at the old fellow and caught him by the arms. The man, stimulated by alcohol, was doubly strong. He struggled savagely, hissing threats at the brothers.

Joe, who had paused momentarily to look at the camera, jumped to the assistance of his brother. Just then the door banged open and the hotel manager strode in, accompanied by a house detective.

"What's the rumpus here?" the latter demanded.

"A drunken fellow just entered our room," Joe panted, stepping aside as Frank obtained a jiu-jitsu hold on the man, pinning him motionless. This did not prevent the latter from screaming at the top of his lungs, whereupon Joe stuffed a handkerchief into his mouth.

"All right, boys, I'll take him," said the detective, a burly fellow. "Oh, it's Garret! Yeah, I know him. Pretty dangerous when he 'a drunk. I'll lock him up for the night."

The Missing Camera 201

He attempted to twist the watchman's arm behind him, but soon found the fellow too much for him to handle. It was only with the boys' assistance that he bound the intruder hand and foot.

"All right, Garret, you and I are goin' for a little ride to the cooler!"

The watchman glared at him ferociously, but was helpless. The detective threw him over his shoulder and marched from the room, the hotel manager following at a safe distance.

"I hope the camera's all right!" Frank quickly went to the table and picked up the device.

"Smashed!" he groaned, handing it to Joe.

"Jiminy crickets I Wait, the lens is all right, Frank. I think we can fix the bent part ourselves. "

As the boys worked over the damaged instrument Frank suddenly had an idea.

"Joe, I'll bet dollars to doughnuts that we have another intruder tonight. Why not rig up this thing so it'll take a picture automatically of whomever may come in?"

"Swell! And easy enough, too. Have we some wire anywhere?"

Half an hour later Joe stepped back proudly and surveyed their handiwork. The camera stood concealed on a shelf, focussed toward the door. A thin strand of wire passed from the knob to the instrument's starting-mechanism.

"Well, let's turn off the lights and hope for

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the best," Frank laughed. "Probably our mysterious visitor won't come, now that everything's fixed. We'd better hide in the closet, anyhow."

The clock ticked off an hour. Suddenly Joe grabbed his brother's sleeve. "Listen!" he whispered.

They could hear the sound of muffled footsteps on the carpet outside their room. The steps came nearer, then paused. The door-knob turned softly.

There was a sudden blinding flash of light and a puff of smoke, followed by a scream. Frank sprang to the light-switch and snapped it on.

Chet stood in the doorway, white-faced and trembling. One hand, suspended in mid-air, held a large, red apple.

Joe burst out laughing. "Look at our mysterious prowler, Frank!" he squealed.

"Our doom has finally caught up with us!" his brother cried out, bent double with laughter. "Chet, of all people!"

The plump boy glared at his chums.

"If you think throwing bombs at folks ia funny-" he began.

"Oh, be a sport, Chet!" Joe cut in. "We're sorry, really. We were waiting for the other fellow. You know, the one who leaves the notes."

"And all we got was a picture of our own Chet eating an apple!" Frank laughed. " Wait

The Missing Camera 203

till we send it back to his girl in Bayport!"

"It'll be worth framing, I'll bet!" Joe chuckled. "Come on, let's develop it!"

Chet soon regained his usual good humor, though he had been frightened badly. By the time Joe had developed the picture in a makeshift dark room in the closet, the stout lad was as ready to laugh as the others.

It was nearly midnight when the chums finished re-setting the camera trap. They decided to go out for a bite to eat before retiring for the night.

" Wait, fellows," interrupted Joe. " How are we going to get back into the room without taking our own pictures?"

" It's all right, Joe," his brother replied. «' I fixed it so the door will open a little without touching off the trigger. Even Chet can squeeze through if we guide him."

Twenty minutes later the trio returned.

"You go first, Frank," the younger Hardy suggested. "Watch him, Chet," he whispered to the stout lad. "I'll bet he'll open it too far and get his picture snapped!"

Frank opened the door part way and squeezed inside.

"Maybe our visitor has already been here," he said with a strange feeling that a surprise was in store for them.

He switched on the light. The camera, wires and all, had disappeared!

CHAPTER XXIV

A BTJKIBD LIFEBOAT

A shock of dismay swept over them.

"That's the last straw!" Chet said in a voice husky with fright. "I'm going home!"

"No, you 're not!" rasped Frank. "Fellows, we'll have to do some fast work. We've been entrusted with Chipsley's camera and it's gone. We must find it!"

"It would be bad enough if the camera belonged to us, but it doesn't," Joe groaned. "Furthermore, it's worth a fortune. If Kuntz should get it-----"

"He'll be the only diver in the country who'll ever be given contracts," Frank finished. "He'll be famous over night for the work he can do with that little instrument."

"And there's no telling what else besides legitimate diving jobs he'll use it for," his brother suggested. "With that camera it would be a simple matter to locate hidden bank vaults and such things."

Suddenly the phone bell jangled.

"It's the hotel clerk," whispered Frank, holding his hand over the mouthpiece.

"Yes," he continued, "this is Frank Hardy."

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How's that? Oh! Very well. Thank you."

"What is it?" Joe inquired.

"The clerk says Mr. Perry called while we were out. He wants us to come down to the barge right away and bring the camera. They need another series of pictures to clear up some complications the divers have run into."

"Golly, isn't that just our luck!" Joe muttered disconsolately.

"We'd better tell the police," Chet murmured.

"Oh, they wouldn't be able to help much," Joe protested.

"No, I think Chet's right," the older Hardy lad decided. "They may not find a clue, and then again it's possible they will. It's worth a try."

On their way to the dock the boys stopped off at the local police headquarters, where Frank explained the situation and asked for help in locating the camera. The desk sergeant promised to assign a man to the task immediately.

"We'll let you boys know if we find out anything," the official said.

At the dock Perry emerged from the darkness to greet them, his face wreathed in smiles.

"We've removed nearly a thousand dollars' worth of jewels already, fellows!" he exclaimed, "but I think some of the gold and silver bullion is in an adjoining vault. We can't get into it without a lot of trouble, and we need the camera." He suddenly stopped, seeing the gloomy

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look on Frank's face. "Why, what's the matter?"

"The camera-it's gone!" Joe blurted out.

"Stolen! About an hour ago!"

Frank related the incident, adding that they had enlisted the aid of the police and that they would not rest until the device had been recovered.

Perry clenched his fists. "If ever I lay my hands on Kuntz, I'll-" He paused, too angry to finish.

"I think the thing for you to do, Mr. Perry, is to go ahead with the work on the *Katawa*, at least as much of it as you can do without more pictures," Frank suggested. "In the meantime, Joe and Chet and I will find Kuntz somehow and get back that machine one way or another."

"It's likely he has the thing," the diver replied, "though there's a chance that such is not the case. Somebody else may have stolen it."

"Quite true," Joe admitted, "but whoever he was, he undoubtedly did the job for Kuntz. "We'd better work on that premise until we find out differently."

"Well, best of luck, fellows!" Perry called, attempting *io* be cheerful. "We'll be waiting to hear from you."

With a wave of his big hand he jumped into the skiff and disappeared in the darkness.

«' What now ?" blinked Chet. «' Are we start-

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ing out on some more wild detective chases? Why not go back and get a little sleep first?"

"Frank, I've an idea!" Joe suddenly burst out. "How about Hornblow, the crazy officer? Do you suppose that by some chance he got away from the asylum? Maybe *he's* mixed up with the warnings we've been getting."

"There's a bare possibility that he might be," Frank admitted. "Won't do any harm to call the place and find out."

The chums piled into their car and raced to the nearest roadside tavern. Frank disappeared into a phone booth.

"What do you know about that!" he exclaimed, running out a moment later. "Horn-blow escaped from the asylum last week. They haven't found a trace of him!"

"If we find him, I'll bet we'll have a clue to at least some of our problems," Joe said excitedly. "It's even possible that he stole the camera. Maybe Kuntz hasn't it after all!"

It was now long past midnight. There seemed to be little chance of conducting a search before morning so the chums turned in and slept fitfully until dawn.

"I've a plan," Frank announced at breakfast. "Chet might stay here at the hotel today and watch for Kuntz, Bock and Simon. If he sees them he can find out somehow where they're going and let us know when we return. Joe, you and I can scout around town, each of us going by himself."

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"Good idea," Joe agreed. "We should discover something."

An inquiry at the hotel desk revealed that Kuntz had not given up his room, though it had been unoccupied for several days. He had not been seen in the lobby. With Chet on watch, the Hardys departed.

"I think I'll go around to the hospital and talk to Chipsley first," Joe decided. "Might possibly get a clue there. I'll meet you here at seven o'clock tonight."

Frank's first stop was at police headquarters.

"I'm sorry, young man, but we haven't found a trace of the camera yet," the sergeant replied to the lad's inquiry. "We'll let you know as soon as we do."

The boy spent the forenoon trudging about town, hoping to catch a glimpse of one or more of the missing scoundrels. After a fruitless hunt he turned into a sandwich shop at noon for a bite to eat. A ragged newsboy came in after him.

"Paper, Mister?"

Frank bought a copy of the Journal and gazed at it idly. Suddenly a small headline near the bottom of the second page startled him. Hastily he finished his sandwich, folded the paper into his pocket, and walked rapidly toward the hotel.

"Hello, Frank, what are you doing back here again?" asked a familiar voice at his elbow.

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"Joe! Golly, I'm glad you're here. I was hoping you'd be around. Look at this headline."

Joe murmured aloud as he scanned the dispatch.

" 'WARNING TO REED'S POINT CITIZENS. Look out for maniac who escaped from Overlook Sanatorium last Friday night.' Golly, Frank, that must be Hornblow!" Joe cried.

"Read the rest of it. See if you get the same hunch I did."

The dispatch ran thus:

"Authorities at Overlook Sanatorium caution all citizens to be on watch for a dangerous inmate who made a bold escape from the institution in broad daylight last Friday. The name of the man was not revealed, but it was said that he is a former ship's officer. Local police are patrolling Reed's Point dock, where divers are attempting to raise a cargo of valuables from the sunken *Katawa*, following a statement by Dr. C. J. Crow of the Overlook staff that the man might be found among the spectators."

Joe hesitated a moment, then jumped up, his eyes alight. "I think I know what you're driving at!" he exclaimed. "Could the fellow be hiding in the sand dunes somewhere, awaiting a chance to look for the lifeboat he was raving about?"

"Exactly!" Frank agreed. "Of course, it's

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only a hunch. It must sound a little faint fetched,"

"I think it's a swell idea! Hornblow certainly believes his own story, and with all the excitement about the *Katawa* now he may have decided to try to find the treasure. But-----"

"Oh, there are a lot of objections, I know," the older Hardy lad admitted. "For instance, why would he think that the officers would steal the gold and then go away and leave it?"

"Well, the man's mind is off center, Frank. He probably remembers only one thing-that the officers put the gold in the lifeboat and rowed to the beach, assuming, of course, that such a thing happened at all."

"Whether it occurred or not, Hornblow thinks it did, so there's a chance that he might try to follow up his idea."

The brothers agreed that a search of the lonely beach might be worth the effort. Accordingly, they set out for the edge of town.

"Golly, Frank, this sand must reach all the way from here to Florida. Where '11 we start I"

"If Hornblow's around at all, he won't be far from the *Katawa*."

They walked a little distance along the beach, and paused to look around. The scene was indeed a desolate one. Sand and water stretched away for miles. To the north they could see the village in the distance. A little to the right of the town was the dock, half hidden behind intervening sand dunes. The barge was faintly

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visible, riding the long ocean swells far out in the haze.

To the south, which was the direction they were taking, there was nothing but sand and ocean. Here and there were clumps of marsh grass waving from dunes and hillocks. The sea was frothing with white-caps.

"We'll look around this part of the beach now and try the north side of the dock tomorrow," Frank decided.

They trudged for more than an hour without seeing a sign of anything indicating that Hornblow might be in the vicinity. At length it began to grow dark. Ominous storm clouds began piling up in the southwest, so the lads turned around and headed back toward the distant village.

"Shucks, I think this is a wild goose chase," Joe grumbled, rubbing his aching legs, "looking for a maniac a hundred miles from nowhere !"

A flash of lightning streaked across the sky and was followed by a rumble of thunder. It was now so dark that the boys could hardly see the sand beneath their feet.

"I'm afraid we're going to get wet," said Frank, "unless we can cover the quarter of a mile back to the car in a hurry! I-----"

He was interrupted by a cry from his brother.

"Frank! What's that? Look!"

Far down the lonely beach behind them a sheet of flame had sprung up suddenly.

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"Bonfire!" Frank cried. " Just about where we turned around to come back."

They strained their eyes intently, and could see the shadow of a human figure flitting before the flames every few seconds.

"Joe! Get the police quick! That's Horn-blow, sure as anything!"

His younger brother dashed off in the darkness and Frank hurriedly retraced his steps toward the fire. He turned inland to avoid being discovered, skirting a fringe of tall swamp grass along the inner margin of the beach. A quarter of an hour later he arrived opposite the fire, which was raging just out of reach of the pounding surf.

Frank peered cautiously through the thick grass. For a moment he could see nothing but flames. Suddenly a shrouded figure emerged from behind the glare and came toward him.

To his relief, the strange apparition stopped its advance scarcely a dozen feet from him. It stood still for a moment, then withdrew a email shovel from the folds of its black cape. Frank heard a soft crunch on the sand.

The figure bent here and there, digging furiously. Suddenly the black hood tumbled off, and in the firelight Frank recognized the face. It was that of Hornblow!

The older Hardy lad's first impulse was to run up and seize the fellow, but he rejected the idea instantly. Better to watch him a while and see what would happen.

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Fifteen minutes later the demented officer was still digging, pausing now and then only long enough to toss another armful of driftwood on the fire.

Frank could hear him muttering to himself as the hole in the sand became deeper.

"Gold! That's what I want! The gold!" he was mumbling excitedly. "It's here, down here in the buried lifeboat!" Panting heavily, he redoubled his efforts. Grains of sand caught by the rising wind blew about in all directions.

Suddenly Frank thought he heard a rustle in the grass not far from him. He strained his eyes through the shadows near by, just in time to see three men sneak up silently behind the laboring maniac.

Before the lad could move a muscle one of the strangers had raised a bulky object and flung it at Hornblow's head. The unfortunate man crumpled up without a sound.

CHAPTER XXV

SUCCESS AT LAST

fob an instant Frank stared at the scene, frozen with horror. The strangers, their backs toward him, lifted the motionless figure and threw it aside.

"That disposes of *him!*" snorted a voice, strangely familiar in its stark unpleasantness. "Come on, you two, let's have a look in that hole."

With a chill Frank recognized Kuntz as the speaker. The other two were undoubtedly Bock and Simon. His suspicions were confirmed an instant later.

"Mr. Kuntz! There's something here! Shine your light here, Simon!"

Bock was partly out of sight in the excavation, which was remarkably deep for the length of time Hornblow had worked on it. Kuntz grabbed Simon by the arm.

"Go get some more wood for that fire!" he ordered gruffly. "I'll see what your pal found."

He strode over to the hole and peered in by the aid of his flashlight.

"It's a boat!" Bock yelled. "The *Katawa's*

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lifeboat. The crazy fellow has it almost out!"

"By Jove, you're right," said the diver, jumping down into the hole alongside of Bock. "Look under the seats! I'll open the bulkheads. "

There was a moment's silence, broken only by a gritty sound as the two explored the rotting dory.

"Nothing under any of the seats," Bock announced disappointedly.

"Shut up!" snapped Kuntz. "There must be! Look again! Didn't that fellow Roy say the gold was under the seats and in the bulkheads?"

"Yes, he did," growled Bock. "And he'd better be right, too! If-----"

Frank waited no longer. He had expected Joe before this time, and there was not a moment to lose. Alone, the older Hardy lad knew it would be futile for him to tackle the three ruffians. He decided to go a little way back toward town. If he still could see no sign of his brother and the others he would return to the bonfire and take his chances with Kuntz and the diver's cronies. As he turned to slip away through the marsh grass, Simon, who was watching the others, uttered a cry.

"What's that? Listen!"

Frank thought he had been discovered. To his surprise he too heard a strange sound.

"Somebody's coming now!" Bock exclaimed hoarsely.

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The muffled crunch of footsteps on sand was unmistakable.

"Bun for it!" Kuntz barked, but the two cowardly ruffians had started already.

With a cry Frank leaped for the diver as he clambered out of the pit in the sand. The impact knocked the giant flat, with the Hardy lad on top of him. At the same instant a police whistle screeched out and a chorus of hoarse cries issued from the blackness.

"Frank!" came a shout.

"Hurry, Joe! Get Bock and Simon!" panted the older Hardy boy as he struggled with the big man.

Relentlessly Kuntz's fist found the lad's throat and slowly tightened over it. With a desperate surge Frank tore himself loose from the diver's iron grip and swung his fist. As his assailant went limp the boy found himself suddenly surrounded by several police officers. Joe stood alongside his brother, breathing heavily.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

"Quick, Joe-Bock and Simon-----"

"We've ^ot 'em, lad!" said a heavy voice as the police chief came up, smiling. "Riley and Brian just took 'em off. Now, what've we here?"

Kuntz still lay motionless on the sand.

"Good work!" exclaimed Joe, seeing the outstretched figure for the first time.

The chief detailed several of his men to carry

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off the diver and rush Hornblow to a hospital. "You boys come with me to the station house," the official told them. "I'll want to hear your whole story."

"Eight, Chief," Frank replied. "We'll have plenty for you. But-----"

He was interrupted by a policeman who suddenly appeared in the firelight.

"Here's something we found on one of those fellows we just caught." He held out a peculiar looking object.

"The camera!" whooped Joe. "Chipsley's camera!"

"Is this the thing you had us looking for!" queried the chief.

"It certainly is, sir!" Frank returned excitedly. "And look, the film gauge points to 'exposed.' "

"Tell you what," suggested Joe Hardy. "I'll go back to the hotel and develop the roll while you're talking with the Chief, Frank."

"Good idea. If our trap worked right, whoever stole the camera took his own picture at the same time."

A little more than an hour later Joe and Chet rushed into the police station, where Frank was relating all he knew of the activities of Kuntz,

Bock and Simon. He paused on the threshold as the official was saying something to three disheveled men lined up against the wall.

"You insist you didn't hit Hornblow over the

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head?" thundered the policeman, looking hard at Kuntz.

The diver glared back. "I didn't know the fellow was named Hornblow, and we didn't hit him. We saw him lying there when we came up."

"Do you swear to that?"

"Yes!" muttered Kuntz, scowling blackly.

Frank was about to interrupt when Joe spoke first.

"Chief, may I have your permission to show you something now?" he queried.

"Certainly, my boy," responded the officer. "What is it?"

"Here, Chet, be a good fellow and hang up this screen. Now look at this, Chief!"

Quickly he set down the projector he was carrying, plugged the cord on it into a convenient outlet, and started the motor. Before the astonished eyes of all a strange drama un-wound itself. The scene showed Bock standing in the doorway of the chums' hotel room, his thin, ugly face frozen with astonishment.

"There's our camera thief, no doubt about that!" said Joe. "Now watch!"

An interval of blank film was followed by the sudden appearance of a huge bonfire, beside which a shrouded figure appeared to be digging in the sand.

Abruptly another form came into view and moved stealthily toward the other. The newcomer raised his arm and threw something

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which crashed down on the digger's black hood. The latter individual crumpled, and at the same time the man who had struck the blow turned toward the camera. He was Kuntz!

Rejoicing, the chums jumped into their car and sped to the dock. In answer to Frank's signal by flashlight, a skiff put out for them from the barge. As the little boat drew up beside the pier Perry jumped out.

"Mr. Perry!" Joe shouted. "We've new? for you!"

Excitedly the chums revealed what had happened, and the handsome diver glowed with pleasure.

"I think you've brought the best story I've ever heard!" he exclaimed. "Come on out to the barge and we'll tell John Crux."

But was it the best story? In the near future the Hardys were to become involved with "The Twisted Claw."

Four days later, with the chums taking active part in the task, the *Katawa's* treasure of nearly a million dollars was brought safely to the surface. Each of the boys was presented with a portion of the money. Chipsley, who was recovering rapidly, was likewise rewarded. Then the chums, bidding their friends a warm farewell and promising to meet them in the future, pointed their car homeward.

Hornblow, who had been taken to a hospital by the police officers on that fateful night at the beach, not only recovered from the attack

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but regained his reason as a result. Like many of the cured insane, he was able to recall what he had done during the period of his loss of reason, and he wrote the Hardys a long letter of apology. As they had supposed, it was he who had been their mysterious prowler and the writer of the unsigned warnings. He had also been responsible for frightening Kuntz just after the unscrupulous diver had departed from the Gypsy fortune-teller's shack.

Following his recovery, Hornblow obtained a position with a shipping concern and became a warm friend of the Hardys and Chet. Never again did

he mention his past acts or the *Katawa's* lifeboat, which, as the boys had expected, proved to be empty.

Kuntz and his cronies, Bock and Simon, came up for trial a month after the Hardys had apprehended them, and were sentenced to long terms in the Federal penitentiary.

"Boys," said Fenton Hardy in the living room of their home the night of his sons' return, "you've done your best job yet! That's one of the most exciting stories I ever listened to, and I've been in the detective game all my life!"

"*Too* exciting, I think!" their mother shivered. "I hope you boys will decide to stay home now and lead a peaceful life for a change!"

Joe looked at Frank with a sly smile. His brother winked back.

THE END

THE SECRET WARNING

By FRANKLIN W. DIXON

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